



Foujita and the Nude in Japanese and French Art

Dr. Elizabeth Hornbeck
Dept. of Art History &
Archaeology
University of Missouri

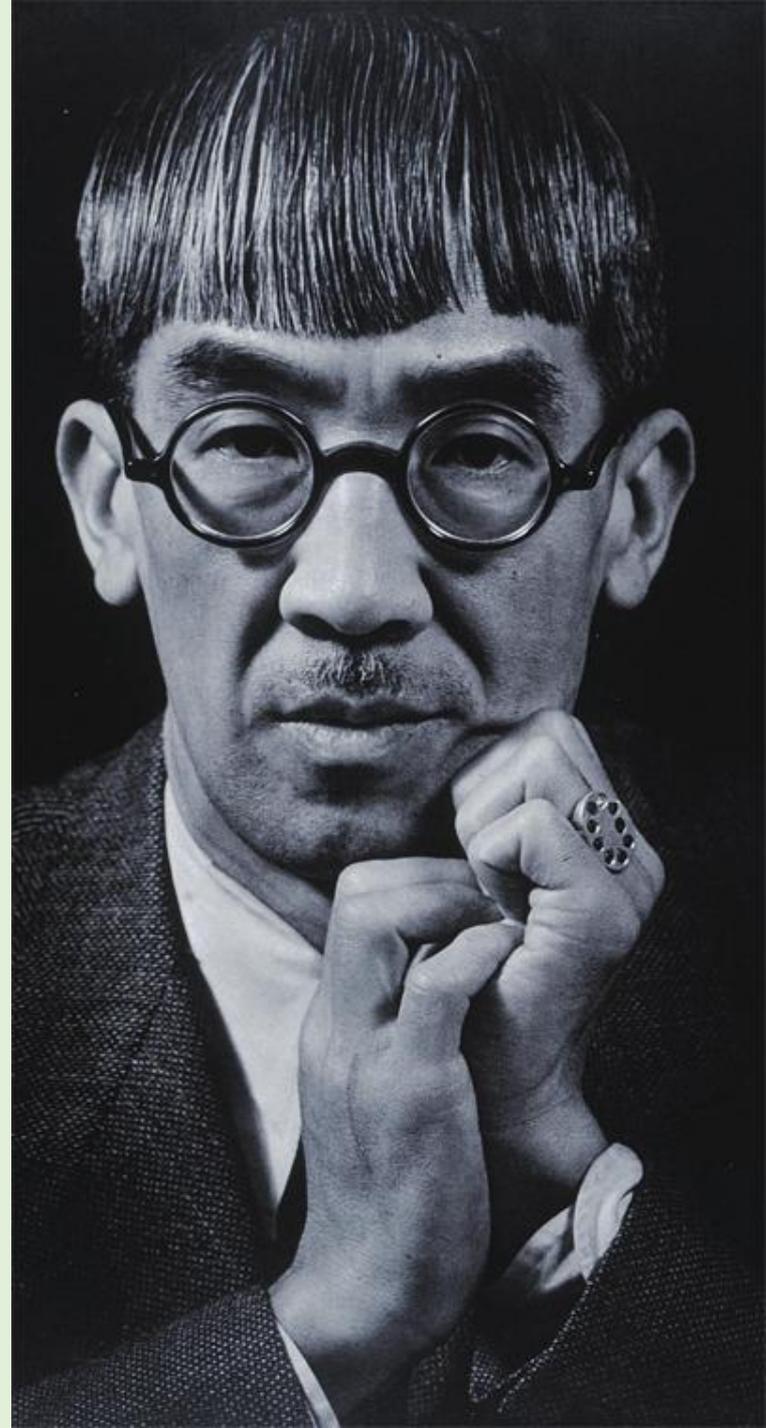
ASDP Infusing Institute 2014
August 7, 2014

Fujita Tsuguji (Tsuguharu), 1886-1968

a.k.a. Léonard Foujita

- b. 1886
- Studied Western painting with Kuroda Seiki at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts; graduated in 1910
- Continued studies with Wada Eisaku, who had studied painting in France from 1899-1903
- 1913: Foujita went to Paris with the encouragement of Mori Ōgai
- By 1918, Foujita began to find success in Paris selling his artwork with help from his first wife, Fernande Vallé, an important art dealer
- Travelled in Europe and South America
- 1933: returned to Japan, remaining there until 1950 when he moved back to France
- 1934: 27 of his paintings were shown in Tokyo at a special exhibition held by the *Nikakai*

Photograph of Foujita by Ansel Adams (n.d.)





Fujita Tsuguji (Tsuguharu), 1886-1968

a.k.a. Léonard Foujita

Self Portrait, 1926,
oil on canvas, 81 x 61 cm.

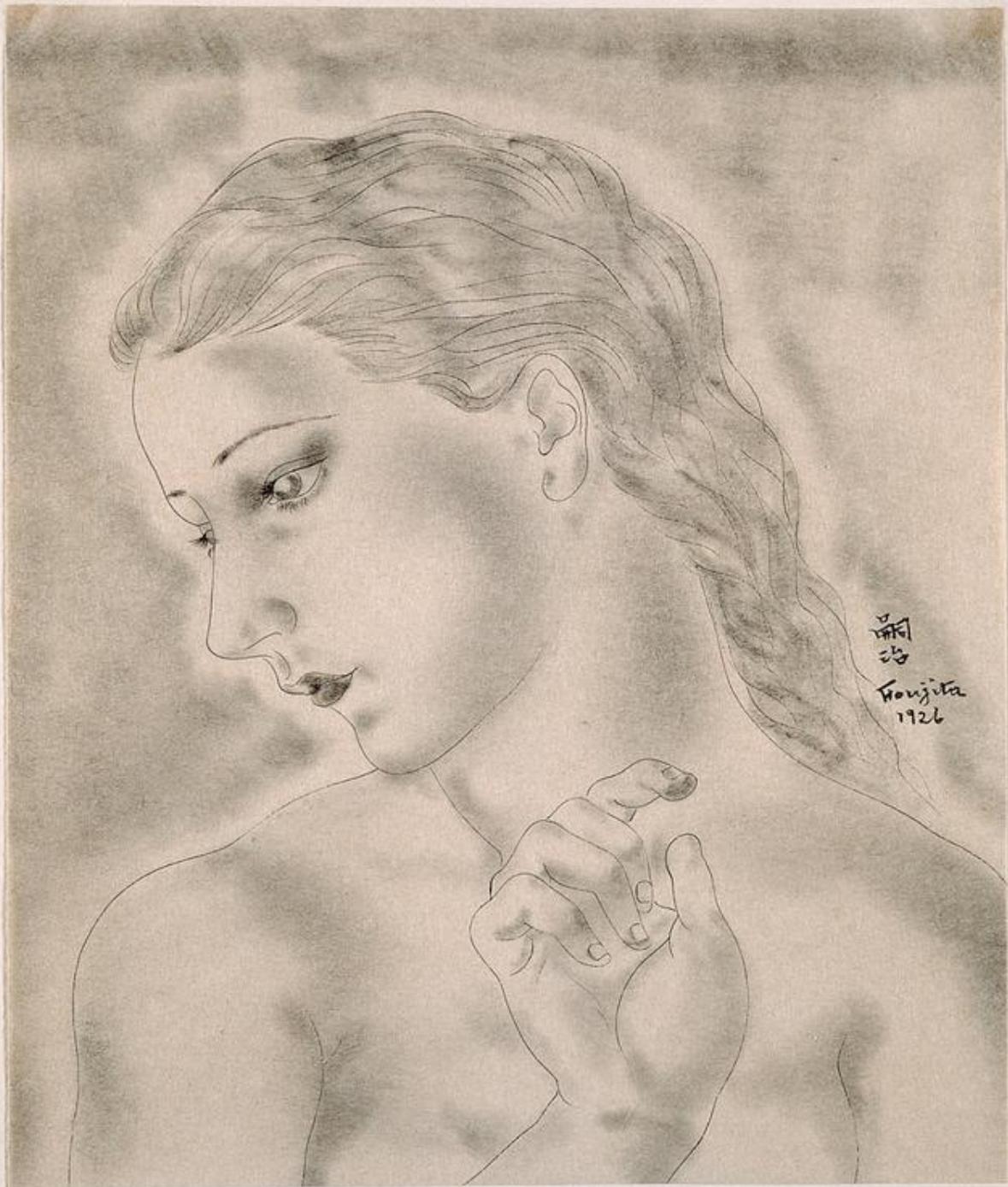
Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon

Foujita developed a unique style (his so-called *grand fond blanc*) of finely drawn lines of constant width on a milky white foundation.

Dessin (drawing) vs. *tableaux* (paintings)

Eventually he became known as “a painter of cats and nudes.”

Foujita, *Head of a Girl*, 1926
pen and black ink and graphite
with stumping
23.9 cm. x 20 cm.
Detroit Institute of Arts





Foujita, *Self Portrait with Cat*, 1927, drypoint, 13 x 9 3/4 in., Dallas Museum of Art



Foujita, *Mother and Child*, 1924, pen and ink on white paper, 12 1/8 x 7 3/16 in. Minneapolis Institute of Arts



Anonymous Japanese artist of the ukiyo-e school, *Courtesan and Attendant Selecting Kimono Designs*, Edo period, c. 1700; hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, 128 x 62 cm., Seattle Museum of Art

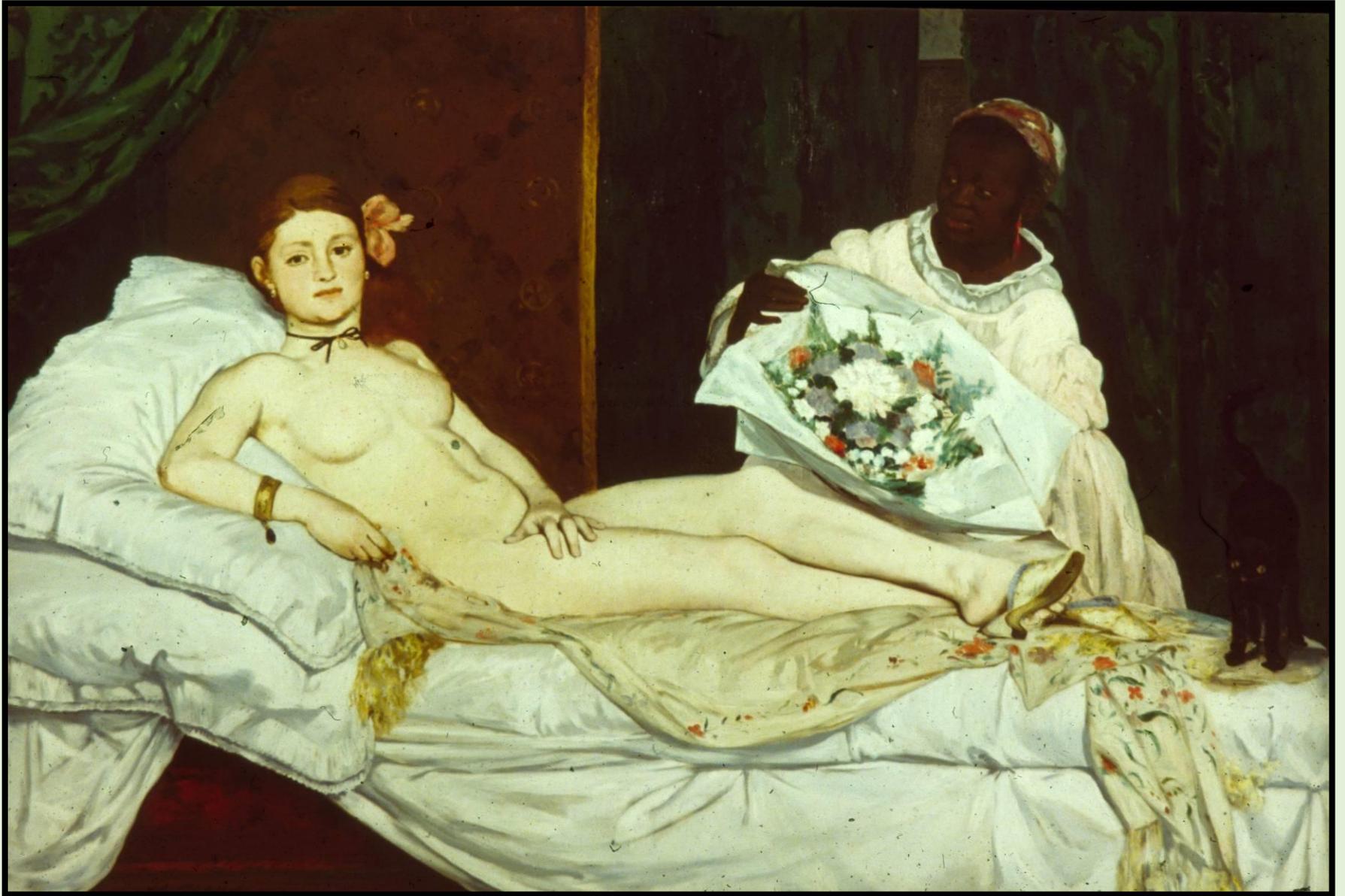


Anonymous Japanese artist of the ukiyo-e school, *Courtesan and Attendant Selecting Kimono Designs*, detail—notice the extreme linearity of the woman's facial features and her hands outlined in front of her chest. This is the linearity that Foujita took from Japanese artistic traditions. Notice that the kimono and the small pot she is holding in her left hand have much more form and detail than does the model's flesh.

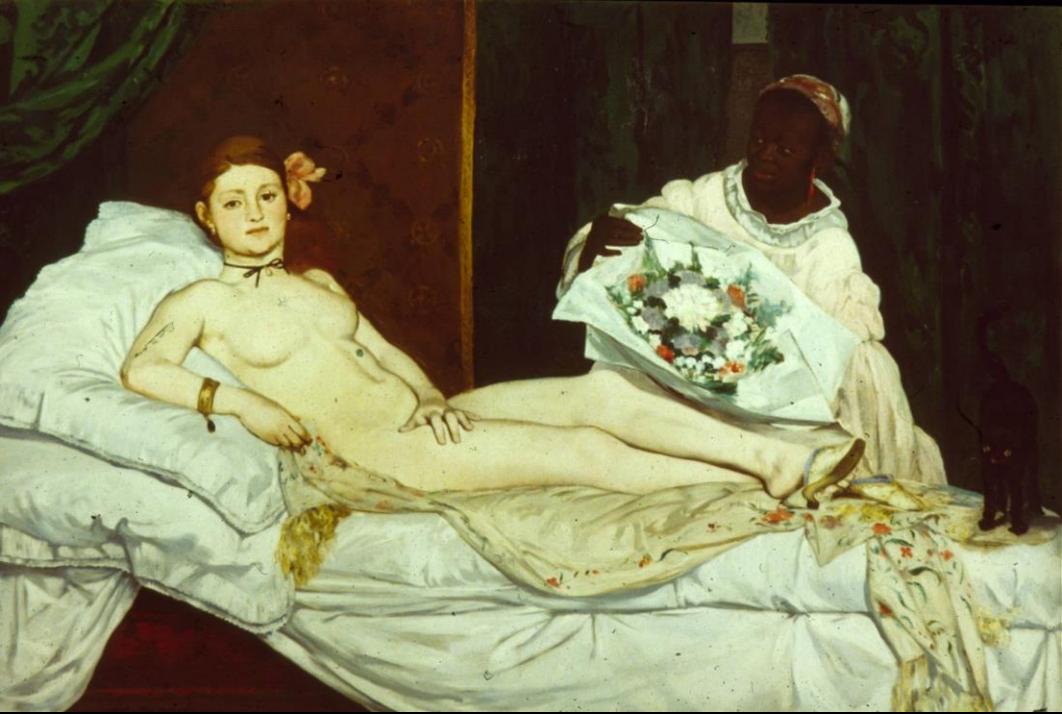


Edouard Manet, *Portrait of Emile Zola*, 1860s

French painter Edouard Manet, like many 19th-century painters in France, was strongly influenced by Japanese prints (he included one in his portrait of Zola). The linear quality of Japanese woodcuts can be seen in Manet's famous nude, *Olympia* (1863).



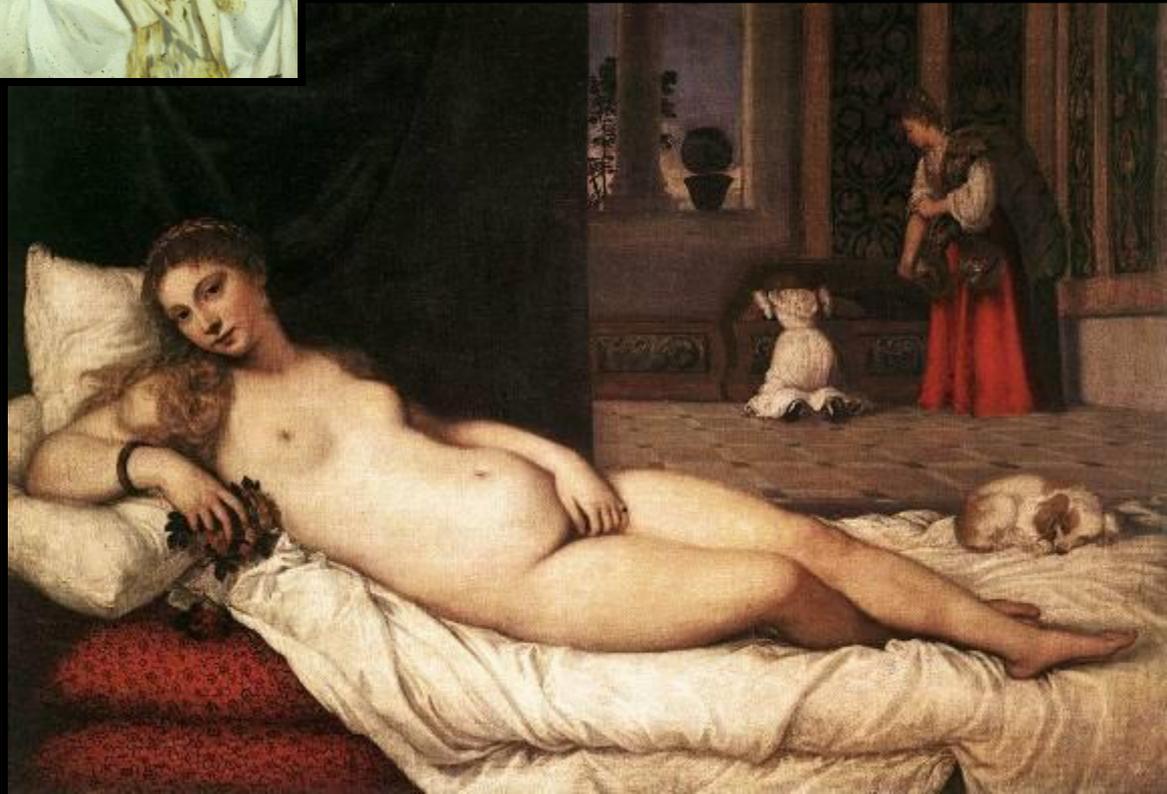
Edouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863

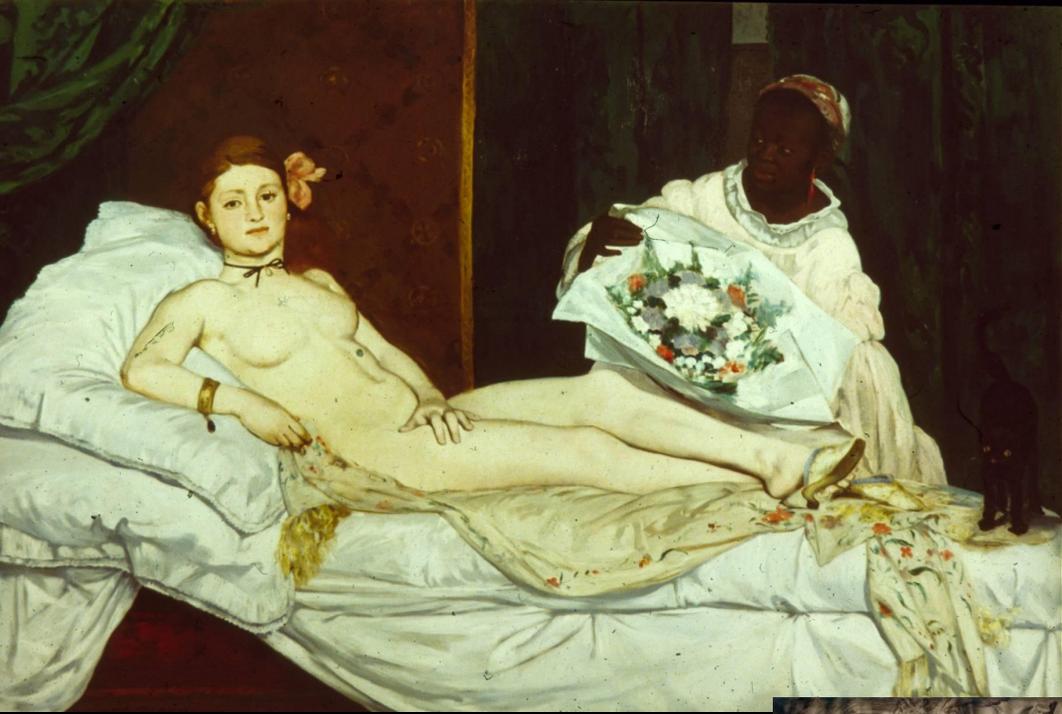


Manet combined Japanese influence with the European tradition of nude painting. Compared with Titian's painting (below), Manet's space is flattened out, and the subject's body is less modelled. Manet resisted European illusionism to help create a "modern" aesthetic in Western painting.

Edouard Manet, *Olympia*,
1863

Titian, *Venus of Urbino*,
1538





Edouard Manet, *Olympia*,
1863

Foujita's nude (below) takes Manet's innovations to a further extreme of flatness and linearity. Notice the contrast between the nude subject and the highly detailed illusionism of the textiles framing her (an homage to the curtain pulled back in the upper left corner of Manet's painting).



Foujita, *Nude*, 1922



Foujita, *Nude (Nu couché à la toile de Jouy)*, 1922; crayon, pen, black chalk, and oil on canvas, 130 x 195 cm., Musée d'art modern de la ville de Paris

“One day it occurred to me that Japan has produced only a small number of nudes. I happened to realize that [the woodblock print artists] Harunobu and Utamaro only exposed part of a leg or knee in order to convey the real feel of skin. It was then that I decided to attempt to convey the real feeling of skin as my own beautiful *matière*, and so I turned again to the painting of nudes after an interval of eight years. . . . I began to reproduce the softness and smoothness of skin, inventing a canvas surface whose very texture has the appearance of skin.” (Foujita)



Foujita, *Nude (Nu couché à la toile de Jouy)*, 1922; crayon, pen, black chalk, and oil on canvas, 130 x 195 cm., Musée d'art modern de la ville de Paris

J. Thomas Rimer, in *Paris in Japan: The Japanese Encounter with European Painting*, 1987 (p. 100):

“By 1920, Fujita had developed his ‘trademark’ style, paintings in elegant design, often of women, in which their flesh was painted as an undulating surface outlined in black, providing a combination of linear clarity and sensuous tactility unusual in French art of the time.”



Foujita, *Nude (Nu couché à la toile de Jouy)*, 1922; crayon, pen, black chalk, and oil on canvas, 130 x 195 cm., Musée d'art modern de la ville de Paris

J. Thomas Rimer, in *Paris in Japan: The Japanese Encounter with European Painting*, 1987 (p. 100):

“Fujita’s originality resulted, at least in part, from his successful juxtaposing of Eastern and Western techniques. For example, his application of semi-transparent Western oil pigments in light washes is redolent of oriental ink and watercolor painting techniques.”



65/100

K. Fujita

Foujita, *Two Nudes*, 1927; color etching, roulette, aquatint, and open bite with scraping on chine colle, Balitmore Museum of Art

Foujita, *Two Female Nudes*,
1930; oil on canvas, 142 x
124.5 cm., Kanagawa
Kenritsu Kindai Bijutsukan





Foujita, *Two Heads*; lithograph, 31.75 x 40.323 cm., Dallas Museum of Art



Foujita, *Chindon Performer and Serving Maid*, 1934, watercolor on paper, 91 x 73 cm.

Kanagawa Kenritsu Kindai Bijutsukan
(Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura)

- Exhibited in Tokyo in 1934 along with two other works on this subject; one Tokyo critic wrote,

“Fujita’s art is never realistic. His works in the present exhibition, particularly those dealing with Japanese customs, are his own *ukiyo-e* intended to create an effect akin to printing. He looks back with nostalgia at some old dream of Japan. All the subjects he has chosen – a sumo wrestler, a fishmonger’s servant boy, a geisha on a back street – are purely Japanese, but he does not portray the major aspects of modern society. Such works may please foreigners but not his Japanese viewers.”



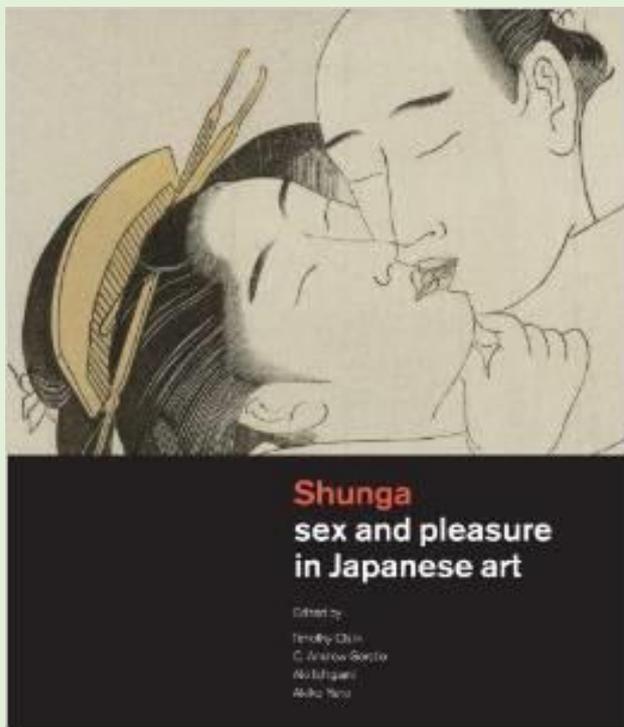
Foujita, *Chindon Performer and Serving Maid*, 1934, watercolor on paper, 91 x 73 cm.

Kanagawa Kenritsu Kindai Bijutsukan
(Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura)

- Exhibition was arranged to evaluate Foujita's suitability for inclusion in the exclusive *Nikakai* artists' group. A panel of critics reviewing the work wrote,

"His recent works, as well as those painted from materials gathered together in Mexico, display such a sense of sadness and gloom that we find it impossible to relate to them with any intimacy."

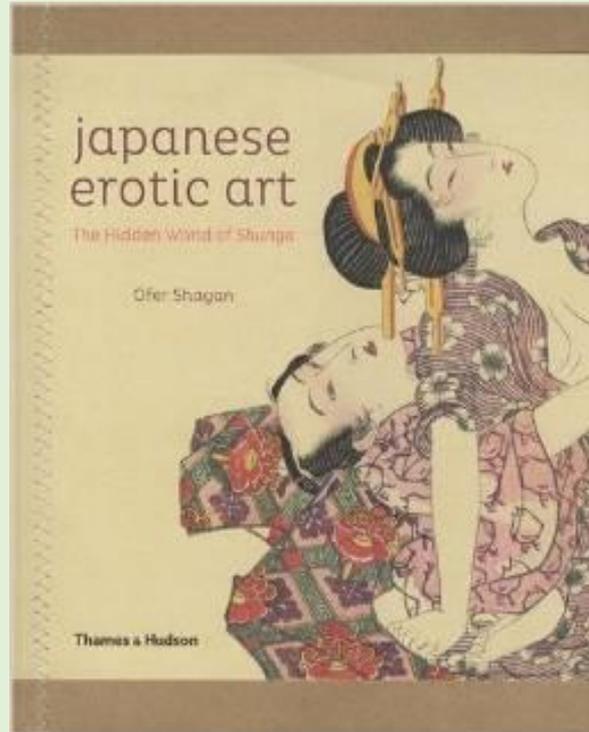
There was a feeling in Japan that, "this is an artist whose time has passed."



Shunga
sex and pleasure
in Japanese art

Edited by
Tensley Dale
C. Andrew Scott
Nobuhiko
Akiba Tera

Shunga: Sex and Pleasure in Japanese Art, 2013, ed. Timothy Clark et. al. (British Museum AEC)



Japanese
erotic art

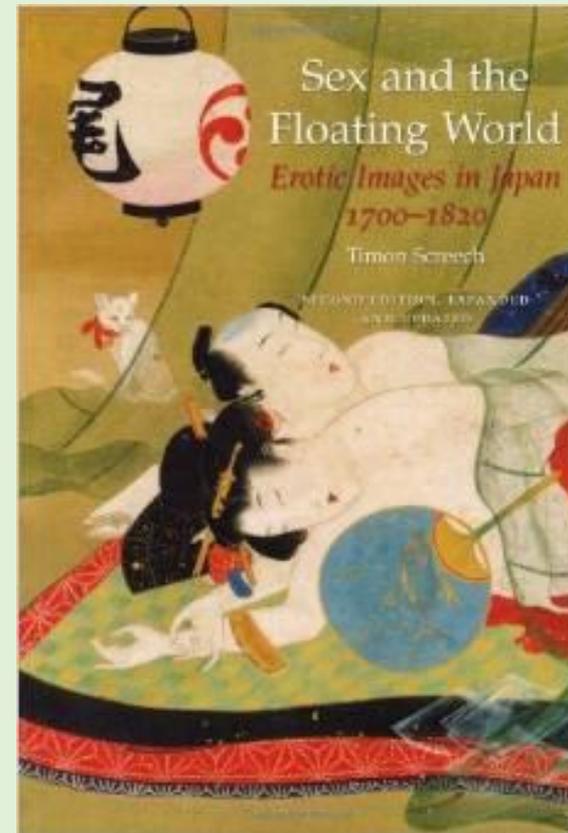
The Hidden World of Shunga

Ofer Shagan

Thames & Hudson

Japanese Erotic Art, Ofer Shagan, 2013

Timon Screech, *Sex and the Floating World: Erotic Images in Japan, 1700-1820*, 1999.



Sex and the
Floating World
Erotic Images in Japan
1700-1820

Timon Screech

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
KAWAOKA KUNISADA

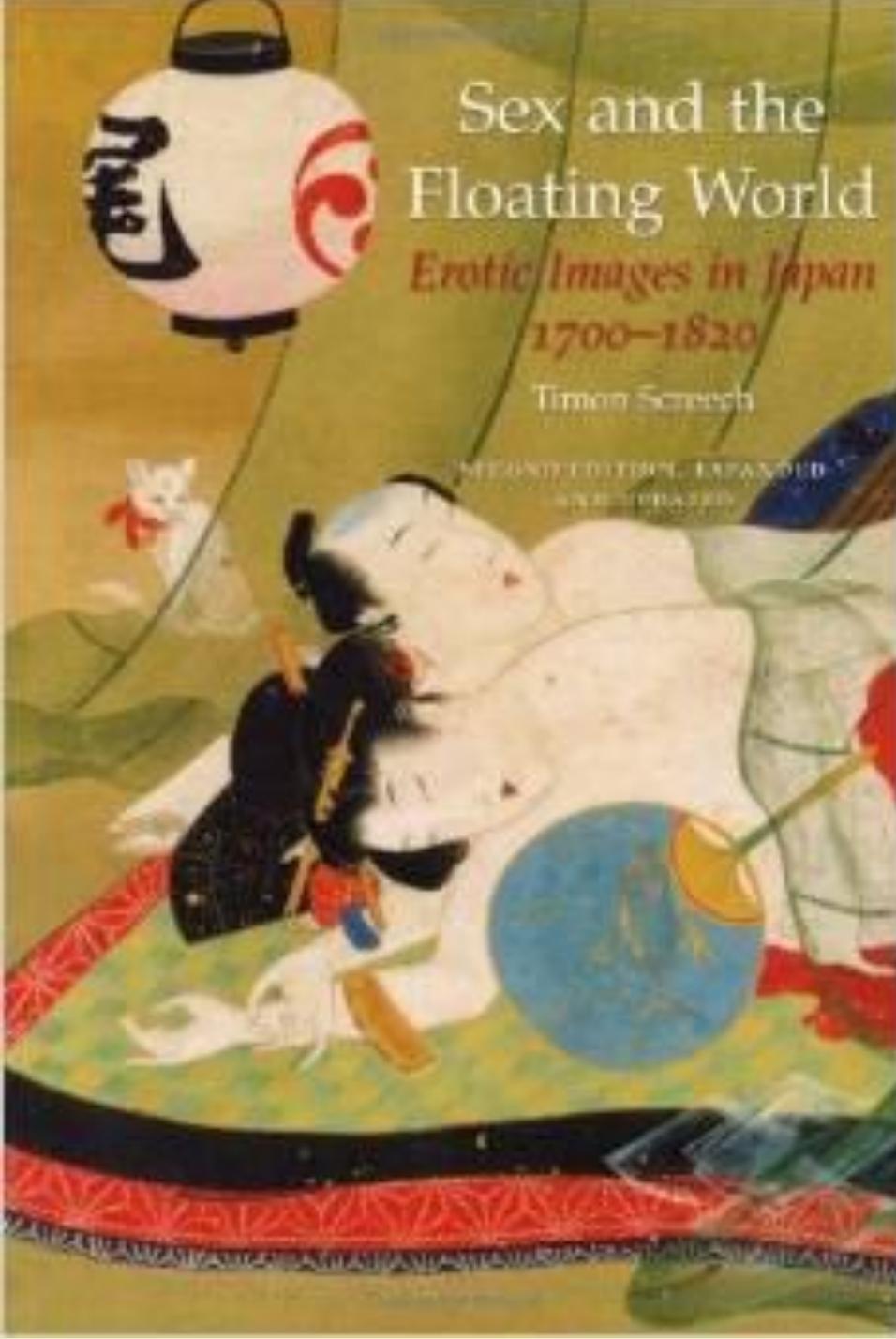


Shunga

EROTIC ART
IN JAPAN

ROSA LINDA AND

Shunga: Erotic Art in Japan, by Rosalind Buckland, 2013



Timon Screech, *Sex and the Floating World: Erotic Images in Japan, 1700-1820*, University of Hawai'i Press, 1999.

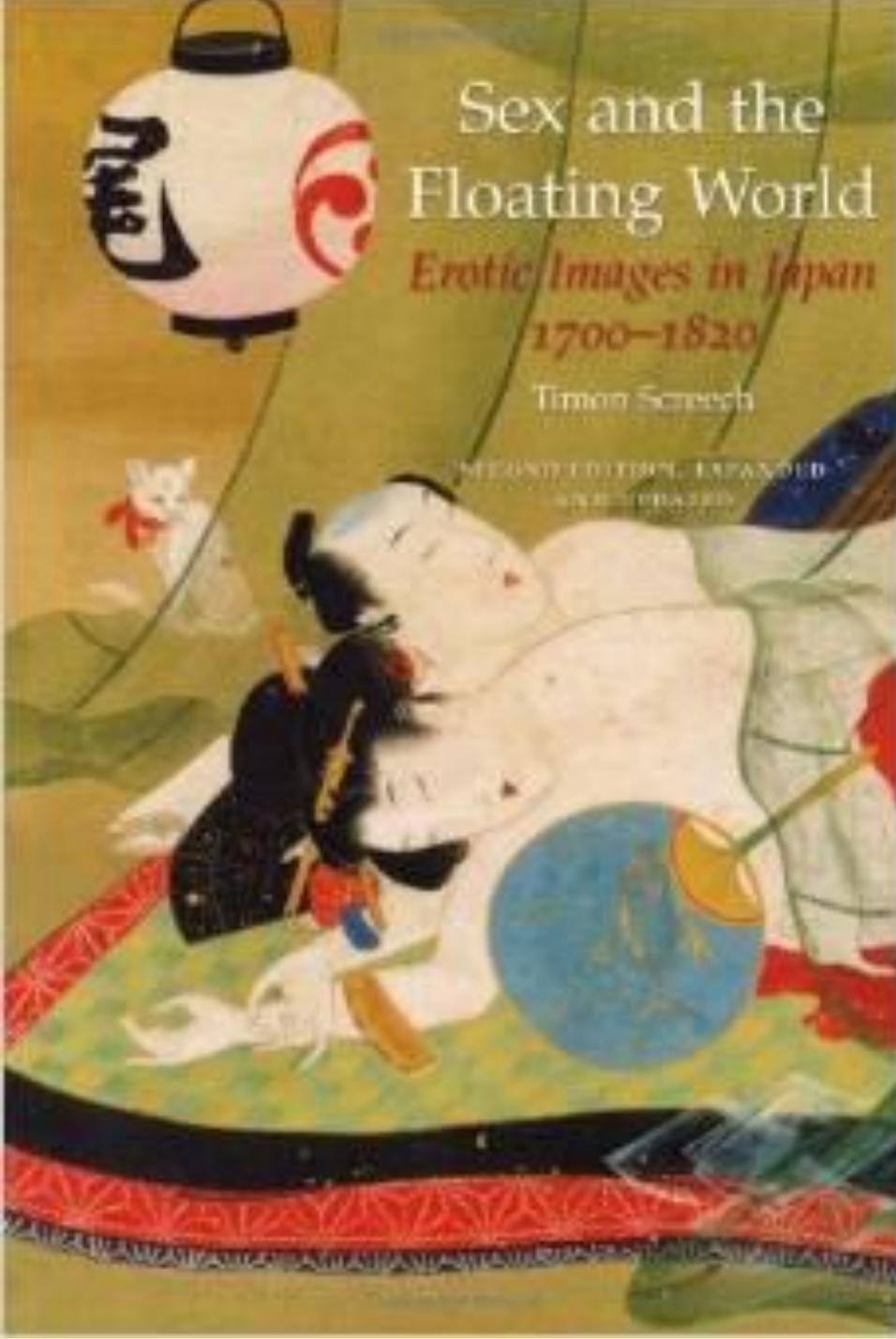
- Morishima Chūryō, 1787, explained to Japanese readers that learning to draw the human body was regarded as the cornerstone of Western art, and grasping the fundamental differences between male and female was essential. (p. 101)
- “As the Edo regime of the body attached scant gender-specificity to external parts it accorded small erotic value to the shapes formed by skin, so it was not of much use for artists to show them....it was clothing that made gender (and erotic) statements powerful.” (p. 104)



Kitagawa Utamaro, *Hokkoku Goshoku Sum I: Teppo*, woodblock print, 18th c.



Kitagawa Utamaro, *A Flirt* from the series *Ten Studies in Female Physiognomy*, woodblock print, 1791-1792



Images of sexual intercourse:

makura-e = pillow pictures

warai-e = laughing pictures

less explicit pictures of flirtation and seduction:

abuna-e = risky pictures

non-explicit pictures of characters from the demi-monde:

bijin-e or bijin-ga = beautiful

figure pictures

nigao-e = facial likeness pictures

yakusha-e = actor pictures

today, scholars of Edo period prints refer to erotic images as

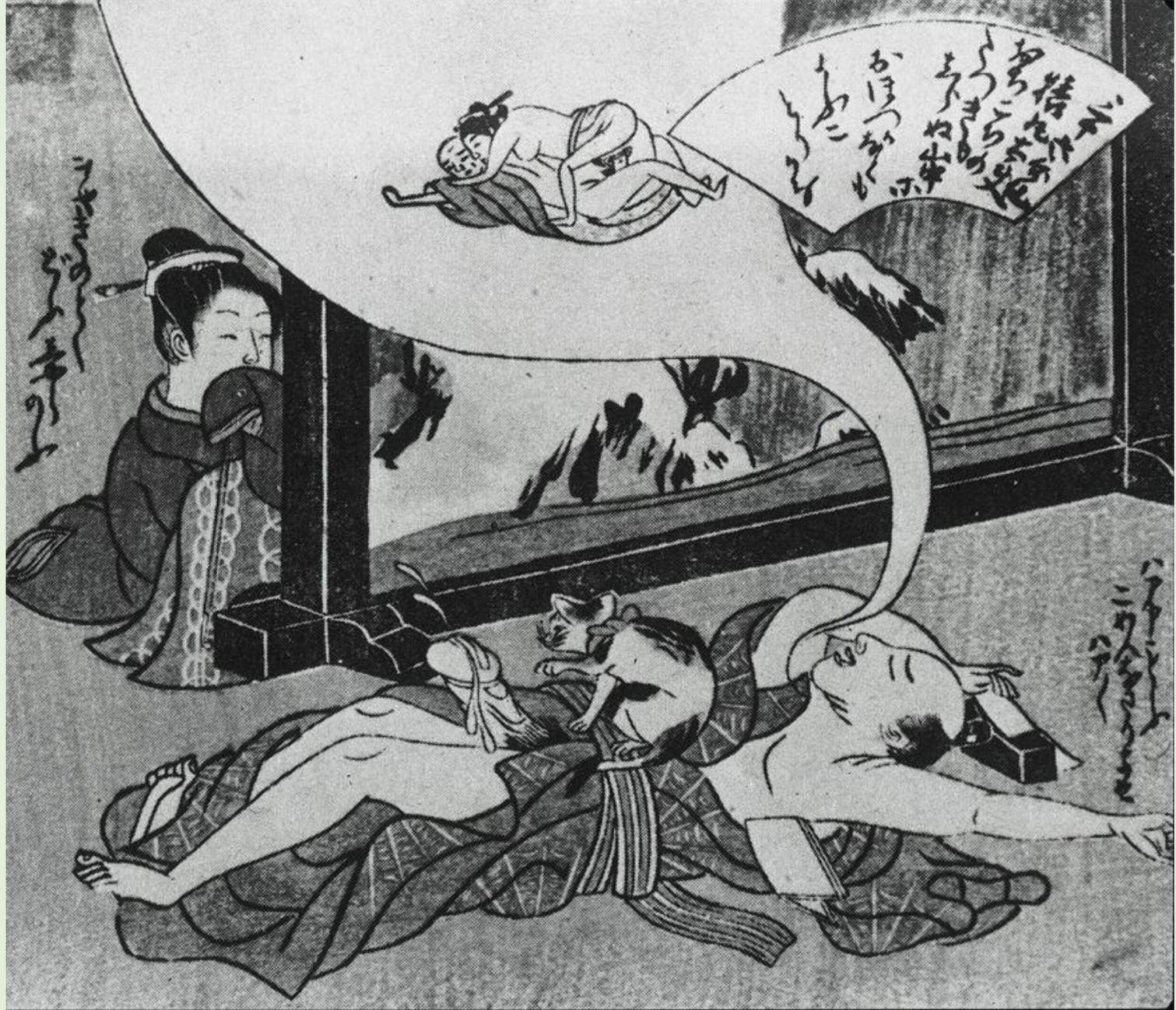
shunga = spring pictures

in Japan they're called

higa = secret pictures



Hokusai (1760-1849), shunga print; color woodcut, 18.3 x 25.5 cm., Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco



Koryusai Isoda, *Thirty-Six Famous Poets: Man Dreaming*, c. 1773, shunga print; 5 x 5.5 cm., Royal Ontario Museum



Suzuki Harunobu, *Young Man Careses Girl*, late 1760s, color print; 7.5 x 10 cm.



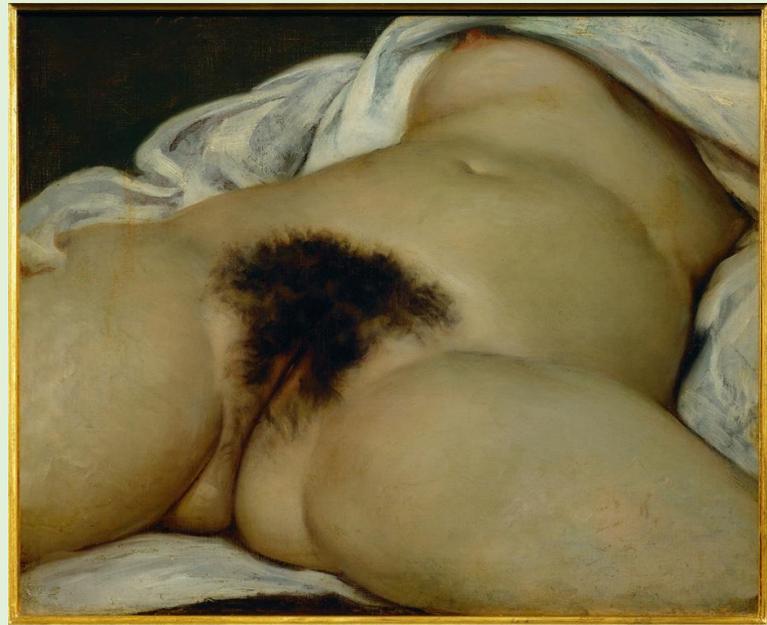
Manner of Kitagawa Utamaro (1754-1806), shunga print; color woodcut, 18.6 x 26.6 cm.,
Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco



Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849), *Examples of Loving Couples (Tsuhi no Hinagata)*; from an album of 12 erotic shunga woodcuts; color woodblock print, c. 1814; 25.1 x 36.6 cm., Musée Guimet, Paris



Anonymous French artist, *Triolism and Masturbation*, 4th quarter of the 18th century or the 1st quarter of the 19th century



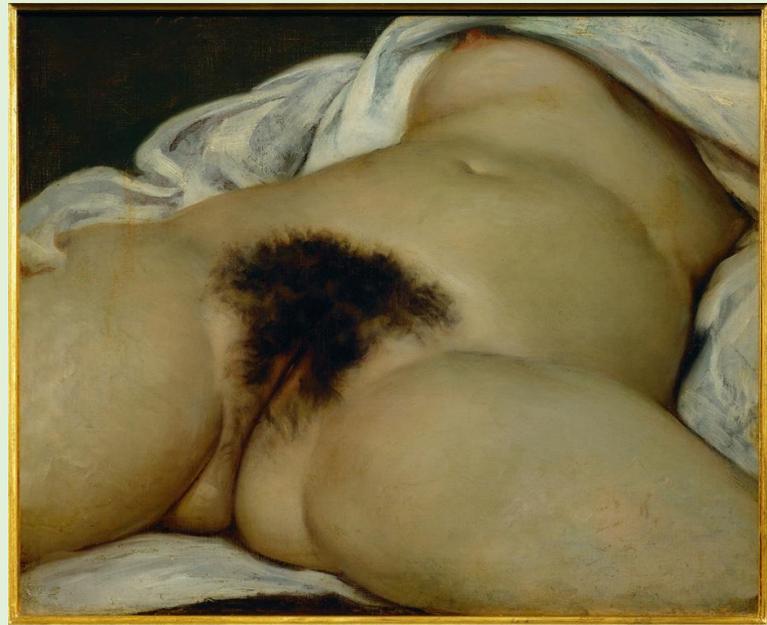
Gustave Courbet, *The Origin of the World*, 1866, oil on canvas, 46 x 55 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

In thinking about Foujita's nudes (a distinctly Western painting genre) and the very different tradition of erotic art in Japan usually involving couples rather than focusing on the female body alone, I was struck by the fact that French art (especially popular art, such as prints) also tended to show couples engaging in sexual activity up until the mid-19th century, when it shifted to representations of the passive female body as signifier of eroticism. This change in French art was spurred in part by the invention of photography.

Art historian Abigail Solomon-Godeau has explored the development of "the imagery of fetishized femininity" in 19th-century France in relationship to both the "commodity fetish" based on capitalism (Marxism and Frankfurt School) and the "psychic fetish" based on sexual perversion (Freud).

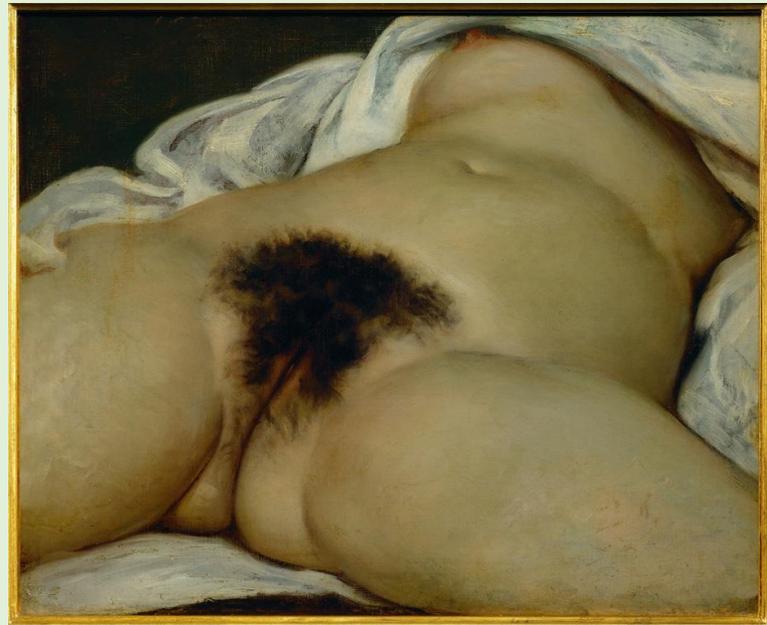


Anonymous French artist, *Triolism and Masturbation*, 4th quarter of the 18th century or the 1st quarter of the 19th century



Gustave Courbet, *The Origin of the World*, 1866, oil on canvas, 46 x 55 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Solomon-Godeau points out that “iconographies that are effectively *about* the feminine as spectacle” emerged in 19th century French prints and photographs. “Consistent with their fetishistic structure, these early pinups observe the same conventional protocols governing the representation of the female nude – the elision of sex organs, elimination of body hair (these are to be found only in pornographic representations), and often a phallic figuration of the entire body itself. Insofar as both image and commodity promise and withhold satisfaction while endlessly provoking desire, there is further justification in mapping their shared psychic purview.”



Solomon-Godeau argues that photographic erotica in 19th-century France “augments and ratifies the tendency, already apparent in lithographic prototypes, to articulate the sexuality of femininity in terms of specularity rather than activity. Whereas traditional graphic pornography conceives of the sexual as active, frequently featuring a male participant as the viewer’s surrogate, photographic pornography, more often than not, devolves on the sight of the female body alone. Moreover, and with specific respect to the beaver shot, the medium of photography can be said to technically foster a radical fragmentation of the body, even as it attests to a fascination with female genitalia that makes the implicit fetishism of the legal erotic unmistakably explicit.”

Abigail Solomon-Godeau, “The Other Side of Venus: The Visual Economy of Feminine Display,” in *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, ed. Victoria de Grazia, with Ellen Furlough (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 113-150.