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THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

THE INFLUENCE OF JAPANESE BRUSHWORK
ON EUROPEAN ART SINCE 1856

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO:

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BY

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P R E F A C E

I fully accept and realize the fact that I have barely (and, I should imagine, not even properly) scratched the surface of what would be a vast and, by its very nature, precarious undertaking. Francis Bacon said "It's ... always hopeless talking about painting - one never does anything but talk around it. If you could explain your painting, you would be explaining your instincts."¹ This indescribable oriental influence being the very element I have tried to deal with in my thesis, I hope I can be forgiven if at times I have appeared vague and been unable to put my finger firmly on anything in particular.

It might be of some help to the reader if he were to acquaint himself with Oriental paintings, drawings and prints. Of more help would be a fresh and open-minded approach to those essential elements in such art which the best critical minds can only talk around, not about. The reader will thus be searching for similar but greatly modified elements in European art before and after the 'explosion' of Oriental art in Europe between 1856 - 1900.

It is generally accepted that "After Lautrec, the innate nature of line in Western painting changed and gained an extra dimension from its contact with Japanese works."² To actually see this subtle but vital change and its possible causes and effects, it might be best to look at the paintings concerned.

I have deliberately not dealt with Oriental influences on tone, form, colour, composition, subject-matter and so on, because while they were extremely important and relevant, these Oriental influences were for European artists at that time simply the means to an end and not the "end" in itself. Accepting the fact that there were other very important elements which also contributed to this change in European painting, not least among them the development of photography, development of Chevreul's colour theories and even the invention of the tube of paint, my purpose in writing this thesis is to attempt to look at the contribution Oriental brushwork made to the "end" or purpose in European art.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As soon as one starts to discuss something as sublime as 'the personal element', one leaves behind a lot of the conventional guiding-rules of art and enters an area which is at best difficult, if not impossible to pinpoint, but which is, nevertheless, perhaps the core of the matter.

In 1640, because of the threat Christianity posed to Japanese culture, Shogun Ieyasu Tokugawa banned foreign trade and travel with Europe. All Europeans were expelled from Japan with the exception of a few Dutch traders. Two centuries later, in 1853, Commadore Matthew Perry was officially received by the Japanese. In 1854 two Japanese ports were opened to trade with the west. In 1855 commercial treaties were made with France, Great Britain, Russia and the United States and with the Netherlands in 1856.¹

All this time, Chinese art was freely available in Europe and was one of the chief influences on the Roccocco style. Meanwhile, Japan and Europe did have a small amount of intercourse even though trade with Europe had been banned by the Japanese for over two centuries. In fact, the Ukiyo-e printmakers whose work caused such a sensation in Europe in the last quarter of the 19th Century had themselves been very much influenced by European art - Dutch prints in particular, which trickled into Japan through the Dutch trading station on the island of Deshima near Nagasaki.

In 1856, the French designer and etcher, Felix Bracquemond



1:1(a) Hokusai:from 'Manga' 1819

1:1(b) Hokusai:from 'Manga'

discovered a book of Hokusai's 'Manga' at the studio of his printer, Delatre. The Manga were a set of sketches; coloured wood-block prints made in the usual Japanese manner from original drawings with coloured washes.

Just at this time, painting in Europe had reached the end of an era. Gustave Courbet (1819-1877) had already laid the foundation for Realist painting. But while this style was influenced and nurtured by photography, it was also made obsolete by it. Realism was leading steadily towards the painting style of the academies where the craft of illusion was becoming increasingly important.



1:2 Chambers: Bonbardment of Algiers

"Picturesque Classical tradition was worn almost threadbare and lifeless formulae had taken the place of classical principles, and the pseudo-classical air was provided from stock ingredients; mountains, trees, waterfalls, ruined towers and fallen pillars".² Courbet's self-portrait of 1854 'Bonjour Monsieur Courbet' is



1:3 Courbet: 'Bonjour Monsieur Courbet' 1854

technically a very good and important work and in its own way was revolutionary, but look at the sheer arrogance of it and indeed other paintings of that period. In this painting "M. Courbet alone has power to obstruct the sun's rays".³

The fact that Japanese art was available in Europe, but regarded as a mere curiosity before Bracquemond's discovery points to the fact that now, the time was ripe for its general introduction and acceptance in the West and apart from the general boredom that abounded because of the academies, its acceptance at this point was due mainly to the photograph and its implications and the colour experiments which eventually gave rise to Pointillism. What Ernest Chesneau said of t, Monet and Degas can well be said of all the Europeans who borrowed from Oriental art; that they "found a confirmation rather than inspiration for their personal ways of seeing, feeling, understanding and interpreting nature. The result was a doubling of individual originality instead of a cowardly submission to Japanese art".⁴

It is a paradox that the Japanese art that first influenced the Impressionists was, like European art, starting to decline and I find it particularly sad to note that Japanese artists, unlike Modern European painters, tended to slavishly imitate European art and lose their own identity.⁵

That European art was in a process of change at this time is undoubtedly true, but it is certain that it could never have taken the course it did without the help of the Far East. Is asking how European art would have developed if Japan had remained firm in her non-acceptance of Western civilization not rather like asking how the Renaissance could have developed without the re-appraisal of Greek art?

Since the re-appraisal of Japanese art in Europe since 1856, its influence on Modern and hence, on contemporary art has been enormous and underrated. It has caused important changes in every aspect of European painting, for example, composition, perspective, line, tone, colour, form, subject-matter, but most of all - and with least recognition - it has had an influence on the 'spirit' or emphasis on feeling or expression which I call 'the personal element'.

There is a strange dichotomy in Oriental art between feeling and non-feeling and much of their work can be mistakenly thought of as cold and impersonal. The way of Zen is one of total absorption in nature and the universe. Yet, an essential belief of the Orientals was that "when representing an object suggesting strength such, for instance as a rocky cliff, the beak or talons of a bird, the tiger's claw, or the limbs and branches of a tree, the moment the brush is applied, the sentiment of strength must be invoked and felt throughout the artist's system and imparted through his arm and hand and so transmitted into the object painted".⁶ The Japanese ideal was therefore to somehow capture the soul rather than the 'likeness' of the object being painted and their whole philosophy and method of working was geared to this end. Zen Buddhists, in fact, used their painting as an aid to meditation rather than vice-versa.

It is highly probably that while van Gogh and Lautrec used the already borrowed and well-documented formal elements from Japanese art and used extensively by other artists, they also took as one of their main influences something of this innate metaphysical quality, perhaps even subconsciously adapting it as they did their other 'borrowed' influences, as it was especially relevant to their own personal vision; in other words that this Oriental quality was the thing that spurred van Gogh and Lautrec on to their new discoveries about line, colour, form, composition - all geared towards expression of "the private person".⁷

In adapting Oriental art, Western artists broke or ignored certain 'golden rules' - much to the distaste of the French Academy and, indeed, the public at large - and later through more and more exclusion, the artist was able to leave behind the representation of the physical world and express something of himself solely, giving us something like Bissier's non-figurative works.

1:4

1:4 · Photographic study used by Theodore Robinson for the Layette c.1889-1890



1:5

1:5 Theodore Robinson 'The Layette' 1891



The development of photography at the time of the Impressionists was steadily dispensing with illusion and photographic realism in painting (figs. 1:4 and 1:5). Artists made use of the photograph and because of its existence were now able to concentrate on other, perhaps more essential things. Van Gogh was well aware that one must distort or change the drawing or the colour to achieve any genuine feeling and spoke of the advantages of the distortion in Hokusai's print "The Waves at Kanagawa"⁸ (Fig. 1:6). What he was saying in effect is an apparent contradiction, that in order to make the drawing more real one must, through distortion, make it less real! Other artists, of course, did this before van Gogh, take Rembrandt, van Eyck, Goya, el Greco, for example, but it was much more an intuitive distortion on their part - "they thought that they were recording".⁹

In 1911 Henri Gaudier-Brzeska wrote: "For Plato, it is perfectly right for a Father to kill his daughter if she does not wish to marry a particular person, or his son if he does not obey him: to me, this is odious, and in the same way, why should I, in aesthetics, necessarily be obliged to accept certain parts of their laws which to my senses are equally horrible and seem to me to be relics of barbarism?"¹⁰ Here, Gaudier-Brzeska had just been discussing Greek art and used this analogy to support the artist's right to deviate from certain accepted classical principles (or, indeed, any personally unacceptable principles) to fulfill his own vision.

We will now proceed to take a look at some paintings and drawings by a few different European artists and to compare them to Japanese artists work. I have dealt only with artists work I particularly like and I have referred, as much as possible with European art, to works I have actually seen. I am not suggesting that there are direct influences inspired by the particular Japanese works I have chosen - I would be surprised indeed, to hear that Lautrec actually saw the particular Japanese painting I have compared his to - but I am saying that there is a subtle but important similarity and not of the formal kind, which I can see between these European artists work and elements of Japanese brushwork, one which was contagiously passed on by these artists to the whole



1:6 Hokusai: 'The Waves at Kanagawa' cl823-29 Coloured Woodcut from the series 36 Views of Mount Fuji



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of Modern and Contemporary European art and one which, with a few very rare exceptions, is not present at all in European art before 1856.

I would hope to indicate some of the less-formal changes that Oriental brushwork inspired in Europe through some of the more formal influences.

FOOTNOTES

PREFACE

1. David Sylvester - Interviews with Francis Bacon, Thames & Hudson 1975. p.100
2. Chisaburoh F. Yamada - The influences of Japanese Sumi ink painting on European Modern Art. World Cultures & Modern Art Dr. Monika Goedl-Roth. Exhibition Catalogue, Bruckmann Publishers, Munich 1972. p.148

CHAPTER I

1. Colta Feller Ives The Great Wave: The influence of Japanese Woodcuts on French Prints - Exhibition Catalogue, Metropolitan Museum of Art, N.Y. 1974. p.7
World Cultures & Modern Art gives excellent concise chronological survey of the Japanese influence pp. 86-87
2. R. H. Willenski, English Painting
3. Exhibition Catalogue, Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), Lund Humphries - London & Bradford 1978 p.112
4. Ernest Chesneau - Le Japon a Paris, Gazette des Beaux Arts, Sept. 1878. p.p. 385-97 Colta Feller Ives p.21
5. See many illustrations of Japanese "Impressionist" and "Post-Impressionist" paintings in :- Jo Okada, Modern Japanese Art & Paris - Exhibition Catalogue, National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo 1973
6. Rudolf Arnheim, Art & Visual Perception, Faber & Faber Ltd., 1972. p.416
7. John Von Hartz, August Sander - the history of Photography series, Gordon Frazer, London 1977, p.5
8. The Letters of Van Gogh Editor: Roskill, Fontana 1977 P.290
For more details, see letter to Theo, Sept. 8 1888, p.p. 288-290
9. Sylvester, p.65
10. H. S. Ede, Savage Messiah, Abacus 1972, p.51

CHAPTER 2

VAN GOGH - HOKUSAI

Research has shown that Vincent van Gogh 1853-1890) had closely studied the Japanese Ukiyo-e masters.



2:1 Hiroshige: 'Plum branch in blossom in the Kameido garden' c. 1857 Coloured Woodcut



2:2 Van Gogh: 'The Tree', after Hiroshige c. 1888, oil on canvas.

Ukiyo-e woodblock prints were the first kind of Japanese art discovered by the Western world. "Pictures of the floating world" depict the suburban Edo (modern Tokyo) world of sensual pleasure, courtesans and kabuki theatre - strangely reminiscent of late 19th Century Paris. In Japan at this time, Ukiyo-e prints were (like Modern art in France) considered aesthetically decadent. They were sold as souvenirs for kabuki audiences or as pin-ups of famous courtesans. They were eagerly sought as fashion plates from which the lower classes could learn of the latest hair styles or kimono designs being featured by leading courtesans. The Japanese thought very little of these prints and introduced them to Europe by using them like old newspapers for packing porcelain for export.¹ In a letter to his sister Vincent said "Theo and I have hundreds of Japanese prints".² But the way in which Oriental painting influenced his use of mark both in his drawing style and consequently in his painting has not yet been fully examined. To do this, one needs to examine the Chinese painting manuals and the sketch-books and teaching doctrines of the Japanese masters. "The reader of these treatises and text books constantly encounters a dash-dot system which is bound to the space and area of the picture and related to the objects and their concreteness".³ In all Japanese "Sketch-books",⁴ great importance is always attached to the use of such structural marks. We can be certain that van Gogh was familiar with at least one such

雪月花美人鏡



2:5 Hokusai: 'Woman Reading', Coloured Woodcut



2:3 Van Gogh: 'In a Public Garden' 1888 Pen and ink on paper.



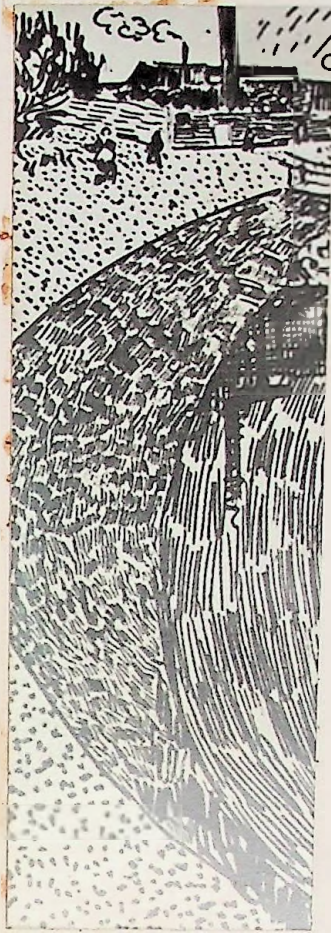
2:4 Hokusai: 'Porters on a road' c.1834 Woodcut The Hundred Views

Monet: Vase
de Fleurs
1882



Seurat:
Study for
Le Chahut
1889





2:6 Van Gogh: Washer-women
1888 (detail)



2:7 Hokusai: from The
Views of Fuji (detail)



2:8 Signac: Paris la Cité

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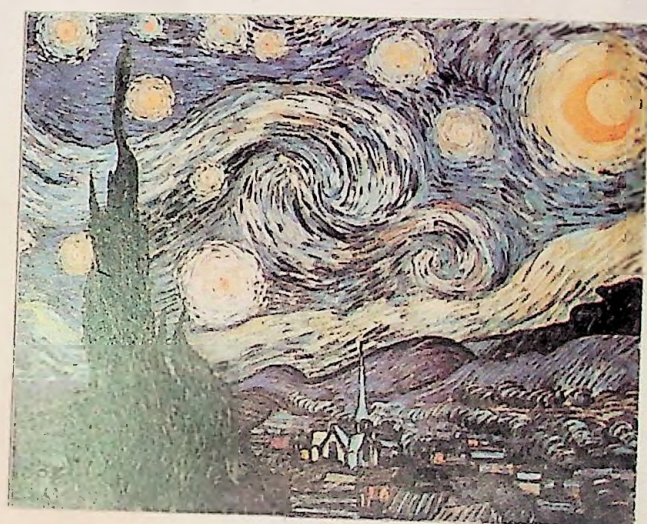


Hokusai: 'Oni' ink on paper



2:13 Van Gogh: 'Cypresses' 1889 ink on paper (detail)

2:11 Van Gogh: 'The Starry Night' 1889



Hokusai: 'Oni' ink

"sketch-book" - Hokusai's manga.

Chinese painting manuals tell us that "the dotting of moss is an extremely difficult matter. In part consciously, and part quite unintentionally, one must dot it in with a concentrated and composed frame of mind..."⁵ This view seems extraordinarily close in concept to van Gogh's revealing statement. He said "My brushstroke has no system at all. I hit the canvas with irregular touches of the brush, which I leave as they are. Patches of thickly laid-on colour, spots of canvas left uncovered, here and there portions that are left absolutely unfinished, repetitions, savageries..."⁶

Van Gogh had a sound intuitive grasp of Japanese art, although he could have read nothing of Oriental methods of working. As yet, all that was known in Europe about Japan were the contents of a few romantic novels. In spite of his claim to his brushstrokes having "no system at all", one finds that the marks van Gogh used, as in Japanese art, have a coherence and innate structure almost unrivalled in the whole of European painting.

Van Gogh's painting style is more often than not, mistakenly interpreted as merely a Pointillist/Impressionist innovation. Certainly he did, in fact, go through a pointillist phase, and all the current aesthetic ideas he encountered in Paris played their part in his development. Yet it is interesting to make some comparison between his drawing and painting and Japanese brush drawings rather than the usual comparison made with Ukiyo-e prints (Figs. 2:3 2:4 2:5). Van Gogh's work changed during his Paris period (1886-88) and, became so utterly different to previous European art that until compared with Oriental brushwork rather than prints, his drawing and, indeed, painting style seems incomprehensible as is commonly implied⁷ as a logical progression from or development of the Japanese print.

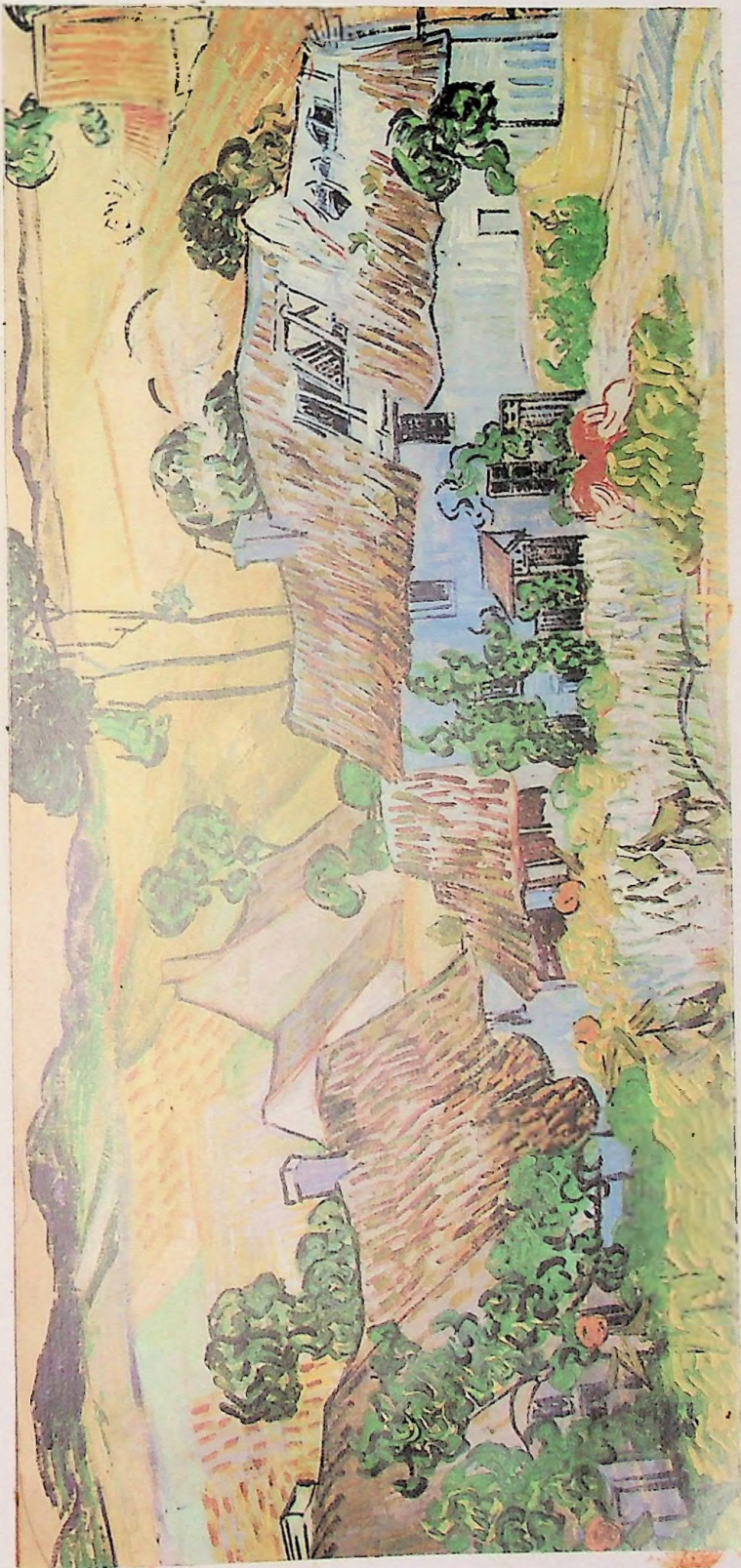
There are many instances of an almost decorative mark in the Japanese print. But these are not nearly so closely related to van Gogh's work as are the marks in a typical Japanese "sketch-book". If we compare van Gogh (Fig. 2:6) to Hokusai (Fig. 2:7) and Paul Signac (Fig. 2:8), it becomes immediately

apparent that the inherent similarity of Hokusai's drawing style is much too close to van Gogh's for his particular type of mark to have evolved from the Japanese print (Fig. 2:3), Impressionism (Fig. 2:9) Neo-Impressionism (Figs. 2:8 & 2:10) or even a combination of all three. In Signac the marks used are almost mechanical. He makes only minute changes in the shapes and sizes of his marks to suggest buildings, trees, sky, people, etc. The marks he uses to suggest the greatest distance - sky near horizon and the nearest point on the canvas are identical in character and only work spatially because of the differences in tone and colour. The use of van Gogh's tone and colour in many of his paintings is a deliberate attempt to destroy any spatial effect. Yet, the drawing itself, his strength of line and variation in type of mark used throughout the composition make it work spatially. The marks used in the bottom left-hand corners of both the van Gogh and Hokusai details (Figs. 2:6 & 2:7) are almost identical in character and both change in shape and size while remaining the same tone as they recede into the distance. Even apart from similarities as regards the immensely powerful yet sensitive line, the strong graphic quality that the two possess, the similarities in composition and something of that unique structural importance which every mark in both artists work has, the two drawings are very close in feeling - so close that even without knowing for certain, by comparing the two, one could not seriously doubt van Gogh's knowledge of Hokusai's brushwork through his 'Manga'.

When we compare Hokusai's actual brush drawings to van Gogh's drawings and paintings (Figs. 2:11 2:12 2:13 2:14 & 4:10) the latter's unique style really comes into perspective. We can now see astonishing links between the two artists work. Again, we can easily see the similarities of the overpowering strength, near-primitive quality and a total lack of sophistication combined with extreme sensitivity and again, the structural importance that each mark bears. But this time, we find that the similarities in the characters of the marks used and the way they are grouped are even closer still than with the printed "sketch-books". There are movements and rhythms in both drawings which are so close as to cause one to ridicule the idea of van Gogh simply having broken with Impressionism to have developed his own style. The fact that he made no references to actual brushwork need not be taken to mean

that he could not have seen any actual drawings. It is possible that he never had any reason to refer to them in his letters. There is evidence, for instance that the Impressionists studied Turner, but hesitated to admit it⁸. Besides, he wrote very few letters while he was in Paris, and that would have been the time he would have seen any drawings. Even if van Gogh could not possibly have seen any of Hokusai's brush drawings - and I can find no concrete evidence either way, the illustrations show just how well he assimilated whatever he did see of Japanese brushwork.

2:14 Van Gogh: 'View at Auvers' 1890



FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER 2

1. Robert Moes, Rosetsu - Exhibition Catalogue. Denver Art Museum 1973, p.68
2. Hans Jaffe - Vincent van Gogh's search for the serene life in the Japanese wood engraving. World Cultures & Modern Art - Munich 1972, p.90
3. Siegfried Wichmann - The Far-Eastern "Dash-Dot-Line" in the work of Vincent van Gogh. World Cultures & Modern Art, Munich 1972, p.90
4. These "sketch-books" were not sketch books in the Western sense, but were, in fact, wood-block prints taken from actual sketches. They were generally printed in black on white (with perhaps an ochre tone) and were kept as close as possible to their original sketch-book form, being, therefore, much closer in essence to Japanese brushwork than the more 'finished' Ukiyo-e print. Compare figs. 1:1, 2:4, 2:5, 2:12.
5. Hans Jaffe, p.91
6. Bogomila Welsh - Ovcharov, Vincent van Gogh - His Paris Period Editors: Victorine, Utrecht-Dhen Haag 1976, p.172
7. See: E. H. Gombrich, The Story of Art, Phaidon 1967, p.417
8. M. E. Chevreul, The Principles of Harmony and contrast of colours and their application to the arts, Reinhold Publishing Corporation 1965, p.39

NAGASAWA ROSETSU AND ZEN PAINTING

A comparison of the work of Nagasawa Rosetsu (1754-1799) with Henri de Toulouse Lautrec (1864-1901), Egon Schiele (1890-1918) and Julius Bissier (1893-1965) might, perhaps be helpful here. I initially decided to compare Lautrec's "Yvette Guilbert" (fig. 4:6) to Rosetsu's "Shojo under a Crescent Moon" (fig. 3:1) because localised colour is used in both drawings and compositionally the two works seemed quite close. There was also something about the quality of line and exciting brushwork in both drawings - a contradictory freedom and control combined with an unusual but similar life and energy. I later found that Rosetsu is perhaps far closer in spirit to Lautrec than most Japanese painters. Rosetsu's work has an unusual personal slant for Japanese painting. But then, he was not like most Japanese artists, a Zen painter as such and seldom used Zen subject matter, even with working on fusuma-e (sliding-door paintings) for Zen temples.¹ Rosetsu always shows a tremendous insight into his subject's character, often with a perceptive display of satirical wit, but he always works with extreme sensitivity. These qualities also make him very suitable for comparison to Lautrec.

By causing colour to be mixed in the eye rather than by mixing pigment on the palette, the Pointillists were, in fact, painting with coloured light (fig. 2:10). By adapting a technique of the old Masters, Lautrec used transparent washes of colour and thereby allowed light to shine through the thin layer of pigment and onto the background, achieving brilliant stained - glass like effects, (fig. 3:2 and 3:4).

3:2 Lautrec: 'La Chambre Séparée' 1899



3:1

ROSETSU:
'Shōjō under a
Crescent Moon.'



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The quality of his colour is reminiscent of the washes of post 1879-82, Cézanne and later Rouault (1871-1958) and Kokoschka (1886-) although the paint is applied very differently in each case. Cézanne used patches of colour whereas Lautrec used rapid excited brush marks and always allowed the making process to show through. This treatment of tone and colour bears a much closer resemblance to Rosetsu, however, than it does to Cézanne or even Rouault, whose use of line and colour in his watercolours may, in fact, have stemmed as much from Lautrec as his early involvement with stained-glass. The way the tone and colour is applied in figs. 3:1, 3:3 and 3:4, is, indeed, very close and relates to Japanese brushwork in general as much as to Rosetsu in particular.



3:3 Rosetsu: 'Bodhidharma'



3:4 Lautrec: 'Jane Avril'

If we compare the face of Rosetsu's Bodhidharma fig. 3:3 and Jane Avril's face, 3:4 we can see Rosetsu's lively brushwork, use of wash, tone, and indeed, colour (as in his Shōjō's hair) reflected in Jane Avril's face. As always, a few revealing lines (and tones) - the linear element has always been an important feature of Lautrec's painting - reveal the whole aura of the subject in both artist's work, with perhaps the

individual marks having more coherence in Rosetsu, but with much more colour in Lautrec.

The purpose of Zen painting (figs. 3:5, 6:1, 6:3) was very different from that of Ukiyo-e. Ukiyo-e celebrated the pleasures of the senses. Although Zen painting accepted these pleasures as an aspect of the path leading to enlightenment, its primary aim was to point the way toward an intuitive total awareness of reality and one's self.² This aspect of Japanese culture was evidently carried forward into the much less formal Ukiyo-e school; Van Gogh said: "isn't it almost an actual religion which these simple Japanese teach us, who live in nature as though themselves were flowers?"³ Zen paintings were both didactic instruments and spiritual exercises. They dealt mainly with characters from Zen legend or the illustration of Zen parables. Figs. 3:3, and 4:5 are two of Rosetsu's few Zen paintings. Fig. 3:3 shows Bodhidharma, the legendary First Patriarch, who is supposed to have brought Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism from India to China.⁴ But Rosetsu's Zen paintings somehow don't have the metaphysical content of other Zenga. Compare his Bodhidharma, for instance, to Natenbō's Bodhidharma fig. 3:5. Rosetsu's Bodhidharma is much more a recognisable portrait of a relatively stern figure. The San states that "The figure of Bodhidharma facing the wall resembles the melons and eggplants of Yahata in Yamashiro". The meaning of the san is that Bodhidharma is as commonplace and delicious as the fine melons and eggplants of Yahata, an area of Kyoto known for its rich soil and excellent produce.⁵ Natenbō would seem to have taken the san as a starting-point for his portrait of Bodhidharma, and it is interesting to note that Natenbō's Bodhidharma is much closer to Bissier's 'Fruit II' than Rosetsu's Bodhidharma.



3:5 Natenbō: 'Bodhidharma'
1925



3:6 Bissier: 'Fruit II' 1937

Zen paintings are painted very quickly - sometimes within seconds, but only after a great deal of concentration. Painting in this way leaves no room for alterations. We can easily see that this is the way that Bissier worked and his drawings were often done on the backs of previous unsuccessful ones.

Most of all, Zen paintings are best suited to comparison with Bissier because of the intrinsic spiritual quality which gives them life, while more human works like Rosetsu are perhaps better for comparison to Lautrec.

3:7 Rosetsu: 'Tiger'
c.1780



FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER 3

1. Robert Moes, Rosetsu - Exhibition Catalogue, Denver Art Museum 1973, p.148
2. Ibid, p.80
3. Roskill - Editor, The Letters of van Gogh, Fontana 1977, p.295
4. Moes, p.148
5. Awakawa, Yasuichi, Zen Painting, Kodansha International/U.S.A. Ltd., 1977

CHAPTER IV

LAUTREC

While there is rarely any link drawn between Oriental brushwork and Lautrec, we can be certain that he was aware of Japanese painting as he ordered a Japanese ink stone, sumi stick and brushes especially from Japan.¹



4:1 Hokusai: Sketch



4:2 Lautrec: Japanese Landscape in the Manner of Hokusai c.1894

The vivacity of Lautrec's early sketches makes it easy for us to understand how easy it was for him to assimilate all that Oriental brushwork had to offer.



4:3 Lautrec: Youthful sketches

I can find no precise information as to exactly what he saw of Oriental painting. Nevertheless, in comparing Yvette Guilbert's head to a typical Ukiyo-e portrait (fig. 2:5) of the type generally known to have influenced the Impressionists and a Rosetsu portrait, one can see clearly that the Guilbert drawing is unlike the printed image yet extremely close in character and execution to the brush drawing. The economy of means, quality of line, spontaneity, freshness and life and humourous almost caricature-like (figs. 4:7, 4:8).

4:4 Lautrec: 'Yvette Guilbert'
(detail) 1894 ink on
paper



4:5 Rosetsu: 'Han-shan and
Shih-te' (detail) ink on
paper



humanity which permeates both these works makes it extremely difficult for us to dismiss this type of Oriental painting as well as Japanese woodcuts as having played anything less than a major part in the development of Lautrec's vision.

As with van Gogh, Lautrec's style would now appear to be a much more logical development of Japanese paintings rather than prints. These Japanese paintings have a dynamism which is just not present in the prints even in the "sketch-books" as Fig: 1:1. Rudolf Arnheim attributes the downward pressure of the printing press rather from forces active along the trails of movement as the main cause of this difference in strength between originals and reproductions.² This might well be why Lautrec and van Gogh choose to take from actual paintings as well as prints.

We will now compare Lautrec's Yvette Guilbert with Rosetsu's "Shōjō under a Crescent Moon". Figs. 4:6 and 3:1.



4:7 Seiko: 'Monkey with its master', ink
and colour on paper



4:8 Lautrec: 'At the Circus Fernando',
ink on paper

In his pictures, Lautrec, like Rosetsu, clearly gives great consideration to the placing of the empty space. Here, (fig. 4:6) Lautrec resorts to cross-hatching to retain form in the face. Like Rosetsu, he uses local colour - a new departure for Europe in drawing at that time. Until this, Western artists when using colour in drawing did so tonally as dark on a mid-tone, with white to highlight areas, but never actual colour.



4:9 Altdorfer (c.1480-1538) 'Scene with Woman and Riders' (detail) pen and ink with white paint

Who before Lautrec would have given an otherwise almost colourless drawing. Such blatant red lips?

Fig. 4:6 and 3:1 are both brush drawings with Lautrec here showing something less than the fluidity of Rosetsu. Rosetsu's drawing gives no more than a hint at a background while Lautrec's has none at all. Nevertheless, while Lautrec's drawing is very free, bordering on the caricature, it is yet so precise that it has a very definite spatial effect. She is locked in space, in her own way, timeless. Even in the hands themselves we find good, solid drawing showing each hand poised in space. This accurate spatial drawing of hands in the 'Yvette Guilbert' drawing would in itself seem to be closely linked to Hokusai's and also Edgar Degas' precise drawing, particularly of feet, which makes visible the plane on which the figure is standing without actually drawing in or representing the plane itself or any shadows which the figure would cast on the ground. (Figs. 4:10, 4:11)

10 Hokusai (1760-1849): 'Oni', ink on paper



4:11 Degas: 'Ballet-Dancer in position facing three-quarters front' 1872 pencil and crayon on paper

We feel the weight of Yvette Guilbert's body move down into her hands and the sensation that she is not, in fact, leaning on anything gives a slightly mysterious quality to the hands and somehow makes them especially important.

In comparison, Lautrec may lack some of the inherent mystical quality of Rosetsu. He was, however, much more concerned with Yvette Guilbert as a person than was Rosetsu with his Shōjō. "The Shōjō (an Orang-Outang) is a mythical creature of the seashore, showing some resemblance to an ape with human features, and with two striking characteristics: flaming red hair and a weakness for strong liquor."³ To my mind his Shōjō, while certainly ethereal, could easily be a beautiful lady looking over her shoulder at a crescent moon - hardly an Oriental Centaur. Lautrec's 'Yvette Guilbert', on the other hand, is very much Yvette Guilbert.

Lautrec's composition, like all Japanese painting is totally balanced, almost isolated and without any unnecessary detail - certainly without anything which is not of prime importance. Every mark on that page is very carefully thought out and placed. The drawing of Yvette Guilbert, while very human in many ways is also elated, metaphysical, having little to do with this world and contemporary European concepts of space, form and structure.

We know that "Redon must have seen work by the followers of men like Sotatsu, Koetsu and Kenzan if not the originals themselves".¹⁶ We can therefore be relatively certain that if

Redon could have come under the influence of Japanese painting then so also did Lautrec. But I would stress the fact that he looked at them in a different and fresher way than Redon, Monet or the Impressionists - more in the way van Gogh did, using as well as the relatively obvious formal ones, much more essential elements; elements which were already present in their work, but using the Far East to help them to express themselves more fully - in Lautrec's case, helping him to make much more personal and valid statements about the people he drew and painted.

One can perhaps see a merging of the Eastern and Western cultures in Lautrec. He, like the Orientals, has somehow gone beyond the mere physical world and entered a sort of timeless no-man's land. Where Rosetsu has given some slight indication of the background, Lautrec has nothing. There is not a thing on that page which is irrelevant - nothing to take away from Yvette Guilbert. But she is not the ambiguous and eternal Shojo. Immortal in her own way, Guilbert still has the decidedly human element so full of emotion and characteristic of Lautrec.



4:12 Lautrec: Sketches of Yvette Guilbert's gloves.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER 4

1. Ives, Colta Feller, The Great Wave - Exhibition Catalogue, Metropolitan Museum of Art, N.Y. 1974, p.87
2. Arnheim, Rudolf, Art & Visual Perception, Faber & Faber Ltd., 1972, p.416
3. J. Hillier, The Harari Collection of Japanese Paintings & Drawings, Vol. 3, Lund Humphries, London 1973, p.164
4. P. D. Cato, R. Johnston, G. P. Weisberg. Japonisme -
Exhibition Catalogue, Cleveland Museum of Art)
Rutgers University Art Gallery) 1975
Walker's Art Gallery)
p.129

CHAPTER V

SCHIELE

Later, Schiele was to deal with the human element in his paintings and drawings in much the same way as Lautrec, but much more intensely and perhaps even more personally. His work is almost a combination of the fluidity and perception of Lautrec together with the intensity of feeling in van Gogh. It could well be said of Schiele that he painted naked people, not nudes. His work is so emotionally intense - almost anguished, that it becomes quite difficult to confront.



5:1 Schiele: 'Seated Male Nude', 1910.

It lacks the humour of Lautrec and is much more severe than Lautrec or van Gogh or, indeed, any artist before him. Totally pessimistic and cynical, his work is emotionally very different from what had gone before him, yet relies heavily on the previous generation.

5:2 Van Gogh: 'Bedroom at Arles', 1888.



5:3 Schiele: 'Bedroom at Neulengbach', 1911.



His "Bedroom at Neulengbach" of 1911 is so close in all respects to van Gogh's "Bedroom at Arles" of 1888 as to be almost a copy and his "Portrait of a Woman with a Large Hat", 1910 is close in character to Lautrec's less cynical portraits, for instance, his portrait of Misia.



5:4 Schiele: 'Portrait of a Woman with a Large Hat', 1910



5:5 Lautrec: 'La Revue Blanche' 1896 Lithograph

Knowing in what way Schiele was influenced by the previous generation gives us some idea of his inherited debt to Japanese art, again, not so much in the formal sense as metaphysically. By taking a look at some of the more formal influences on his work, we might gain a better understanding of the more subjective elements he took from his predecessors and through them, from the Far East.

We will compare his "Recumbent female Nude with Legs apart", 1914 with Lautrec's "Yvette Guilbert", 1894, and Rosetsu's "Shōjō Under a Crescent Moon", 1785-90.

The composition in Schiele's drawing can well be compared to Lautrec. He has given the same attention to the negative areas as Lautrec and Rosetsu, with the blank areas well balanced by the mass of the figure. In the Schiele drawing, the elbow and feet flow out over the page - a device already taken from the photograph and the Japanese print and used extensively by the Impressionists, but never before to such dynamic effect. His cropping of the figure in this particular drawing reminds one more of Philip Pearlstein (1924 -)¹ than Degas.



5:7 Pearlstein: 'Female Model
Reclining on Bentwood Love Seat'

I would see it as being quite possible that Schiele's preoccupation with the person he was drawing and his own particular vision, caused the image to grow out of the picture area in much the same way as Pearlstein's figures do and causing a similar shock element.

In fig. 5:6, Schiele is probably even more concerned with form than was Lautrec. We can see yet again the total absence of unnecessary detail - there is absolutely nothing of a background except the cloth the woman is lying on. Yet, the picture is so well composed and the drawing so accurate that just as Yvette Guilbert needs no props, Schiele's naked lady needs no bed or support. The fact that she is not standing, but lying down without any prop, while we remain almost unaware of that fact, gives quite a subconscious impact to the image.

Note the use of localised colour, this time, used much more strongly and sparingly than by Lautrec, taking from Schiele all possibility of Lautrec's wit. The pose also contributes to the sense of cynicism in Schiele's drawing. This pose is much more daring and confronting than any of Lautrec's nudes who tend to turn away from the viewer while Schiele's stare

5:6 Schiele: 'Recumbent Female Nude with Legs Apart'



out at the spectator and daringly confront him.

Lautrec was more earth-bound than Rosetsu, but Schiele is more harsh than the most cynical Lautrec. Lautrec's naked prostitutes have a certain dignity which is lacking even in Schiele's self-portraits. Schiele's lines have at least as much distortion as Lautrec, but they are less fluid and tend towards tautness, even jaggedness. They give Schiele's work a tension which is about equal to the difference in characterization between Lautrec and Rosetsu.

In Lautrec, the tonal areas are sparse yet significant. The placing of the hands and tone of the gloves give a strong downward pull while the figure is kept buoyant by the two parachute-like frills on her dress and the dark mass of her hair, taking the eye from the top to the bottom of the surface area. In Schiele, the tonal areas are just as sparse and have as much importance. The tone brings the eye from the hair to the cloth under the figure and down to the legs and feet - from upper left to lower right of the surface area.

We always find in Schiele a very human element which is almost lacking in the Oriental portrait, present in Lautrec, and dealt almost exclusively with by Schiele.

FOOTNOTES

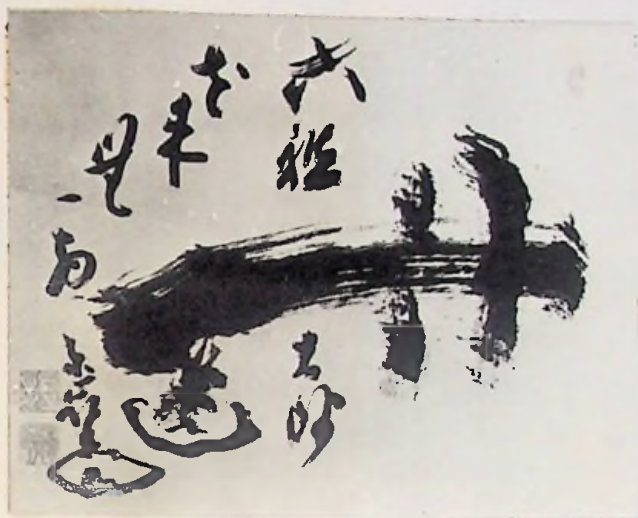
CHAPTER 5

1. For a concise analysis of Pearlstein's use of the module and method of working, see: C. Naylor and G. P. Orridge, Contemporary Artists, St. James Press, London 1972, p.p. 734-35

CHAPTER VI

BISSIER

Even a glance at Bissier's work gives a good indication of his debt to Oriental brushwork. His own use of the brush, concern for the empty space, and even the shapes he worked within confirm this debt to the Far East. But now, three quarters of a century after Bracquemond's discovery, Oriental thought was beginning to take effect in Europe.



6:1 Tōrei: 'The Sixth Patriarch' ink on paper



6:2 Bissier: '8.III.58' 1958 ink on paper

Because of the increasing interest in Zen in Europe, certain metaphysical influences were at last beginning to take effect. Previously, these influences were used intuitively. "Van Gogh's affiliation with Japanese art was not only spontaneous, he also understood this art. He created a new style from this experience which helped shape Fauvism and expressionism."¹ Now, with the increasing awareness in and knowledge of Oriental culture, meditative, mystical and metaphysical influences hitherto almost subconscious were now being valued and sought after. Bissiers "Tellurian to Lunar" 1937, bears a striking similarity to Hakuin's Sanskrit characters. Hakuin is one of the most important painters of Zenga.

6:3 Hakuin
(1685-1768)
'Sanskrit
Characters',
ink on paper



6:4 Bissier:
'Tellurian to
Lunar' 1937/
38





6:9 Bissier: 'On the Death of Oskar Schlemmer' 1943

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A measure of Eastern influence on Western aesthetics may be gathered from the fact that Johannes Itten used to have his students do breathing exercises on the roof of the Weimar Bauhaus in the mornings before class. He said "The training of the body as an instrument of the mind is of great importance to a creative person."²



6:5 Morning exercises 1931

By this means, he hoped that a properly balanced attitude between mind and body was adopted towards the work of the eye and hand. He said, "My first morning periods in class began with relaxation - breathing and concentration exercises to establish the intellectual and physical readiness which make intensive work possible."³

What I have seen of Bissier's early work is very much in the Western tradition and to my mind, while very competent, not particularly interesting.



6:6 Bissier: 'Self Portrait' 1928

After he became interested in Oriental thought, his intensity became very much under control and turned inward, as in Zen painting. Van Gogh's, Lautrec's and Schiele's intensity, however, is much more extrovert, dealing more and more with the subject. They all naturally felt similar emotions to the Orientals, but in realising them artistically, they became more physical than in Oriental work. Van Gogh's later brushwork shows an outward fury in execution which could never have been tolerated in Oriental art. That the same

intensity is present in Bissier as van Gogh, Lautrec and Schiele is undoubtedly true. It hits the spectator full force when he is confronted with the work itself. But it is a controlled intensity, much more reminiscent of the Far East than Europe.



6:7 Bissier: 'Masculine-Feminine Unity Symbol', 1934

Bissier's work would therefore appear to have turned full-circle and become almost totally metaphysical as in Oriental art. Mainly because he was, like van Gogh, Schiele, Lautrec, primarily an individual and a 'first',⁴ his work is much more honest, personal and introverted than say, Robert Motherwell's monumental works, who drew from the same Far Eastern sources but worked after him.

If we may now take a look at Bissier's "On the death of Oskar Schlemmer", 1943, in relation to the paintings already (Fig. 6:9) discussed. This is a typical drawing from the period before he started on his miniatures. Like a lot of his later work, this drawing is made up of relatively vague personal symbols, with this particular one, however, explained; "In a series of four symbols based on the reproductive process of nature Bissier sums up the life of Schlemmer from the fertile cell/seed to division and hence growth, and thence to the ripe, mature seed container spreading its seeds abroad and finally the enclosed dead form containing, nevertheless, the seed of regeneration. To Bissier, Oscar Schlemmer's life had been intensely fruitful and these four symbols are deeply moving."⁵

Again, in this drawing, we can see this Orient-inspired regard for the placing of the empty space which makes it active and positive. The fact that, unlike the other works referred to, there is practically no variation in tone between the shapes along the composition, that all the shapes are basically of similar size and shape and even the fact that the shapes are placed symmetrically, in a straight line down the centre of the page allow the eye to move quite freely along the length of the picture - it is not guided as in the others. The blankness of the tone used gives the work a solemnity in-keeping with the whole concept of the piece. Other drawings are not nearly so grave.

The most immediately striking difference between Bissier's drawings and the others I have mentioned is that Bissier appears to be non-figurative, while the others are partly illustrative. This lack of recognisable figurative content in this and other Bissier drawings does not mean that they are simply 'abstract.' While some of his drawing is more obscure as regards obvious figurative or symbolic references it is, nevertheless, fundamentally figurative or symbolic.



6:8 Bissier: '7.6.56.' 1956

Of his own development, he said: "In my youth, I thought I could best capture the essence of things in the beliefs and forms of the old masters...but many years of struggle led only to my defeat before the schism existing between the power of the object and the intrusive, unavoidable demands made by the law of the picture... Since 1933 I have concentrated on a play of entirely private symbols. I repeated these symbols over and over again in wash, in the style of the Oriental painters, clarifying and improving them with graphic calligraphy. In 1945, I decided to use colour instead of wash... These objects have nothing to do with external nature, not with water, earth nor air; yet somehow they contain all these elements".⁶

This symbolic contrast can be seen from the quotation which explains his "On the Death of Oskar Schlemmer", an otherwise 'abstract' piece. Most people would never understand the reasoning behind this piece without its explanation. Such readings, however, become trivial when one is faced with the honesty and sincerity of the works themselves, although the fact that obvious figurative references are present in his work should not be underestimated, they give the work an added dimension and vitality that much Abstract Expressionist art lacks. He has simply abstracted and simplified, as in all worthwhile art, except more so than most.

Of all the European artists mentioned, Bissier has perhaps achieved the most fluidity and spontaneity. Because of his careful study of Taoism and Zen Buddhism he has inherited and fully assimilated this strange Oriental tension which is impersonal yet at the same time very human and emotional and paradoxically personal.

6:10 Bissier:
'After
Fertilisation'
1938



FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER 6

1. Siegfried Wichmann - The Far-Eastern "Dash-Dot-Line" in the work of Vincent van Gogh. World Cultures and Modern Art; Munich, 1972, p.91
2. Johannes Itten, Design & Form, Thames & Hudson, 1975, p.9
3. Ibid, p.9
4. One may dispute whether it was Julius Bissier or Willi Baumeister who first came into contact with Zen & Taoism in Germany. See World Cultures & Modern Art, Editor: Dr. Monika Goedl-Roth, p.222
5. Werner Schmalenbach, Julius Bissier, 1893-1965, Lund Humphries, London & Bradford, 1977, p.30
6. Franz Roh German Art in the Twentieth Century, Thames & Hudson 1968, p.p. 290-292

CONCLUSION

In my thesis, I have deliberately tried to avoid Oriental influences that have already been dealt with in depth by people who have written about Oriental and European art. To those I could only hope to add perhaps a summary of two or three books with my own connecting commentary. Instead I have tried to deal with what is perhaps a new and refined form of essential quality which I can personally recognise in some Oriental art and also in certain European artists work, with the exception of Rembrandt, from the time of the Impressionists onwards, and one which would seem to have its roots in Oriental brushwork rather than prints.

Again, I have no reason to believe that Rosetsu, Lautrec & Schiele are directly connected. But even if the works discussed have not influenced each other, seeing them together shows just how much these particular European artists understood, perhaps even intuitively, Oriental brushwork.

This thesis has been a great help to me in understanding particularly van Gogh's, Lautrec's and Schiele's work. It takes the 'strangeness' out of their work and places it fully in context. It is no longer so different from what had gone before but can be seen to have taken place because of a meeting of events that took place, so that one could say that these artists' work is as it is, mainly because they happened to be in the 'right' place at the 'right' time!

It may be overstating the case a bit, but I can see in Japanese brushwork since its introduction into Europe at the end of the 19th Century an effect comparable to the sensation which Greek art caused in 15th century renaissance Italy, with, of course, very different causes and effects - a change which is still very powerful in the art world as we know it today. Of course, we must not forget the other vital influences - the invention of the tube of paint, dissertations based on Chevreul's colour experiments, later, many other cultural exchanges and by no means least, the development and use of photography.

Pissarro wrote that "These Japanese confirm my belief in our vision",¹ and while the Japanese influence explains a lot of apparent anachronisms and must not be underrated, it must, nevertheless, be seen as yet another element in the formation of Modern and Contemporary art.

FOOTNOTES

CONCLUSION

1. Camille Pissarro, Letters to his Son, Lucien, Editor:
John Rewald, Paul P. Appel 1972, p.207

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THE INFLUENCE OF JAPANESE BRUSHWORK
ON EUROPEAN ART SINCE 1856

A Thesis by Leslie Cassells: N C A D