



# TAISHŌ CHIC

## JAPANESE MODERNITY, NOSTALGIA & DECO

Education Kit

ART  
GALLERY  
NSW

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## INTRODUCTION

Japan in the early part of the 20th century was a place of great change and challenge, nowhere more evident than the arts of the Greater Taishō period (1910–1930). Western-oriented ideologues championed the avant-garde tastes from Europe and America. The crucial question of the day was: how could one be both Japanese and modern at the same time when modernity was defined as Western?

## JAPAN'S EMBRACE OF WESTERN MODERNITY

The Taishō era in Japan was one of the shortest in its history. It is the reign name of Emperor Yoshihito, who ascended the throne in 1912 and died in 1926. Taishō was settled on as the new reign name and means 'great righteousness', based on a passage from the Chinese book of wisdom *The Spring and Autumn Annals* from the early Zhou era (1050–256 BC). However, when historians speak of the Taishō period, they tend to mean the years between the turn of the 20th century to the mid-1930s called 'Greater Taishō'.

A major theme through this so-called Greater Taishō period was the Japanese struggle for modern cultural identity. This subject was explored in the Gallery's ground-breaking 1998 exhibition *Modern boy – modern girl*, which covered a wide array of styles and subjects to show how all social and cultural developments are reflected in the arts of the Taishō period.

This exhibition, *Taishō chic*, focuses on the image of women in a changing society. Its subtitle – *Japanese modernity, nostalgia and deco* – describes the concept of the show, which is the balance between modernity and nostalgia. They clash violently at times but then again they can be found in a close embrace.

The dichotomy becomes apparent in the image of women. On the one hand we have the 'modern girl' – *modan gaaru* or *moga* for short – who symbolises Westernised modernity, liberation from convention and sexual freedom. On the other, there is the 'good wife – wise mother' who represents traditional values.

The world of the modern girls was that of bars and dance halls, as depicted in the prints *New Carlton dancers*,



*Shanghai and Topsy*. But, unlike the geisha and courtesans of previous times, who were also to be found in these temples of pleasure, these modern girls were there to have fun themselves rather than ensuring entertainment for their male counterparts.

The modern girl or new woman – *atarashii onna* – exposed herself to the public eye with greater self-confidence, engaging in all kinds of outdoor activities. Sports like tennis, golf, hiking, swimming and skiing were introduced to Japan in the 1920s and, after serving as backdrop for several films, became increasingly popular among students and young professionals, for whom they provided a neutral environment for casual socialising.

Western fashion and lifestyle did not only affect the trendy young crowd. They also entered the established households of the upper class. The sitter of a portrait by Wada Seika was Terue Ueda – Mrs T – wife of the astronomer and university professor Yutaka Ueda. In 1929, she accompanied her husband on a two-year tour to America and Europe, bringing back trunks full of the latest Western fashions – some of which she displayed with much pride in this portrait.

These days, well-off families can afford to have one room in their apartments and houses furnished in the traditional Japanese way. In the Taishō period, the nouveau riche endeavoured to have one Western style room, decorated with imported furniture and all kinds of Western – that is, 'modern' – accessories. Mrs T is shown in such a room.

Modern social phenomena and Western fashion were not; however, the sole sources of inspiration for Taishō period artists. A remarkable number of painters and print makers adhered to traditional motifs and modes of expression.

The aesthetics and sensuality of the depictions of beauties – *bijinga* – introduced by countless woodblock print artists of the Edo period (1615–1868) were carried on by artists of the new prints – *shin-hanga* – movement. Inspired by Western realism, they combined modern design with traditional subjects to create highly nostalgic and romanticised views of Japan which appealed much more to Western than Japanese collectors.

The most remarkable feature that distinguishes Taishō period depictions of beauties from their Edo period predecessors is that they are presented as real people of flesh and blood – and, above all, with a complex soul.



*Taishō Emperor and Empress*, c1914 pair of albumen portraits  
Honolulu Academy of Arts Gift of Patricia Salmon, 1994



The women are no longer mere objects of desire for a male audience, but subjects in their own right with the capacity to feel and think.

Accompanying the images of the women in *Taishō chic* are the fashions they wore and household objects they used in daily life. The interplay between modern and traditional is also manifest in the craft and design of these objects.

For instance, there are kimonos in which traditional motifs are altered to create a modern design influenced by Western art. A kimono with a design of flowing water and toy bamboo dragonflies reveals that the maker blended several traditional Japanese textile patterns with unusual motifs to make a fully modern, overall graphic design.

A stacked food box, one of the most used objects in Japanese daily life, usually comes in clear square, round or rectangular form. Taishō craftsmen broke with tradition and took the design in imaginative, playful directions – such as a five-tiered container that mimics the form of a bamboo shoot and is decorated with images of a bamboo forest.

*Taishō chic* was put together by the Honolulu Academy of Arts, which bought many of the paintings in the show's 80 or so items from the collection of Patricia Salmon. She had been a flight attendant for Pan American World Airways before she settled in Japan in the early 1960s, founding a school that offered Japanese women lessons in Western etiquette as well as the first agency that provided western models for Japan's fashion and advertising industries.

In the 70s, Salmon started to deal in Japanese antiques and artefacts of the early 20th century which were easily accessible at that time, having not yet reached scholarly attention and recognition. She returned to the USA in the 80s, settling in Hawaii, where she is still active as an art dealer and consultant. The decorative arts in the exhibition were gifts from her to the Honolulu Academy of Arts, so it is essentially a collection show that reflects her sense of Japanese art.

Organised by the Honolulu Academy of Arts, *Taishō chic* was first shown in Honolulu before touring in the USA and Japan. Sydney is the only city where it will be seen in Australia.

Source: abridged essay by Khanh Trinh, curator of Japanese art for *Look*, membership magazine of the Art Gallery Society of New South Wales, April 2008, pp 28–31

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This selection of work is representative of key media and subject matter explored in the exhibition. The works are listed in chronological order.

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- 4 **Ginza willow** hanging scroll painting
- 5 **Woman's kimono** textiles
- 6 **Three sisters** four-panel screen painting

## COLLECTION CONNECTIONS

While the exhibition artworks are on display in the Gallery for a limited period these key themes and subjects may also be explored in artworks in the Art Gallery of New South Wales permanent Japanese art collection. With each artwork, a suggested collection connection has been offered. They can be used as starting points for developing a greater understanding of Japanese art. Further information on works in the permanent collection can be sourced from the Gallery's collection handbooks, the permanent collection education kit: *Adventures in Asia*, the Gallery research library and archive and the online collection search <http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/browse>.

Front cover: NAKAMURA Daizaburō, *Woman* 1930 (detail)  
signed: Daizaburō seals: Nakamura no in; Daizaburō  
two panel folding screen; ink and colour on silk, 59 x 79 cm  
Honolulu Academy of Arts

Page 2: WADA Seika, *Mrs T* 1932  
two-panel screen; ink & colour on silk  
Honolulu Academy of Arts Purchased with Marjorie Lewis Griffing  
and Beatrice Watson Parent Funds, 1994

Above: *Jūbako* c1925–60  
lacquered wood  
Honolulu Academy of Arts Gift of Patricia Salmon, 1994





1

TERAZAKI Kōgyō (1866–1919)

**Beauty in bathing suit c1915**

woodblock print; ink and colour on paper, 34.3 x 23.4 cm

Honolulu Academy of Arts

Gift of Patricia Salmon, in memory of Arthur and Tena Salmon, 2000 HAA 26782

Terazaki's print modernises the 'beauty-at-the-beach' genre, suggesting neither work nor sightseeing, but rather, the new leisure of ocean bathing. Judging from the swimsuit style, the print dates from early Taishō, when beach-going exploded in popularity. Although the bathing suit today seems impossibly prim, the form-fitting, one-piece suit constituted a dramatic change from the full-cut, multi-piece

bathing costumes popular a decade earlier. This beauty's swimsuit displays the shape of her body as well as the skin of her forearms and legs. Her sensuousness is underscored by her confident pose, left arm resting on the large rock and right hip thrust out as she gazes into the distance.

### VISUAL ARTS

Look carefully at this composition. **Compare** this image to the traditional *ukiyo-e* prints from the Edo period in the 18th century. How are they similar or different? In what way has this artist modernised the composition?

**Research** the technique of Japanese woodblock printing. **Create** a print using scratch foam board or lino using the beach as your inspiration.

### PDHPE

This woodblock print depicts a girl at the beach. What are the health benefits and risks associated with going to the beach? **Discuss** your ideas in class. List the activities you are involved in and assess the risks and benefits. Which activity has the most health benefits? Why?

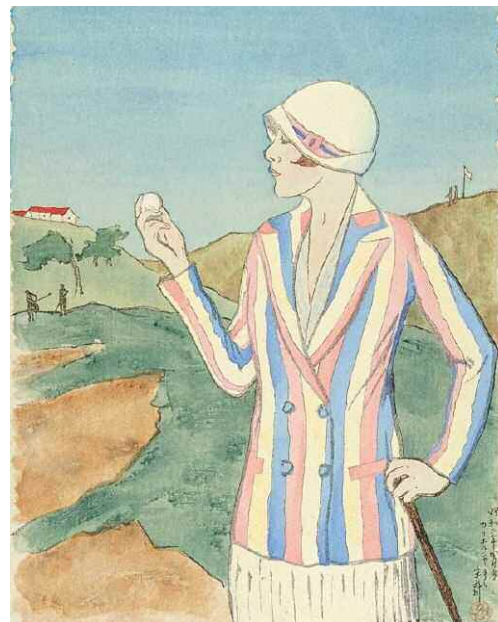
### ENGLISH

**Write** a journal entry for this girl's day at the beach. **Make up** a name for this girl, research and find a place the scene could be set. **Consider** what she is thinking, feeling and seeing around her as well as the sounds, tastes and smells. **Write** the journal entry in images and words.

### HSIE

**Research** the changing fashion styles in Japan from 1900 to 1940. What were the influences of this change? **Compare** the fashion of Japan at this time with fashion in Australia. **Discuss** the similarities and differences.

### COLLECTION CONNECTION



YAMAGISHI Kazue (b1893)

**In California April 1927**

colour woodcut

36.1 x 28.6 cm image; 42.5 x 34 cm sheet

Purchased 1993 336.1993



**Cups and saucers c1912–1926**

glass with ruby-glass overlay, stainless steel, cups  
6.2 x 9.2 cm diameter, saucers 13.3 cm diameter  
Honolulu Academy of Arts  
Gift of Patricia Salmon, 1994 HAA 7592.1-12



# 2

## Cups and saucers

This set of six ruby-overlay and clear-glass cups and saucers attains the epitome of art deco design in the wide linear and scalloped geometric pattern. The glass cup is held within a sleek, minimal stainless-steel mounting. The metal of the curved handles extends around the cup rims, down the sides and into a circular band at the bottom that acts as a base.

The cup and saucers come in a fitted, imitation-leather case with white velvet lining, which bears the label of the Mitsukoshi Department Store. They might have been a summer gift to an upper class family, or a return gift for guests attending an elite wedding celebration.

### VISUAL ARTS

**Research** a variety of art deco artworks from Europe and the USA. **Compare** these artforms with the art deco objects in the exhibition. **Discuss** how these objects show an influence of traditional Japanese styles and vice versa.

**Design** a tea cup and saucer to commemorate special aspects of your school. **Make** your object from papier maché or clay and decorate. **Present** your cup and saucer to the class and discuss how it reflects a sense of place.

**Browse** through the Art Gallery of New South Wales collection on the website for artworks that include domestic objects. Why do you think artists include these objects in their compositions?

### HSIE

**Research** the life and times in Japan between 1850 and 1950. Where does the Taishō period fit into this timeline? From your research what do you think makes this period so significant?

### SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

These objects are made of glass and steel. **Find out** about the process of making and using these materials in domestic objects. **Research** when these materials were introduced to Japan and how they were traditionally used.

### MATHS

With the use of grid paper, design a variety of art deco patterns. **Consider** using elements such as symmetry, repetition and abstracting forms to basic shapes. **Repeat** and colour your designs. **Fold** and shape them into cones, cylinders and boxes and imagine them on domestic objects.

### COLLECTION CONNECTION



KINKŌZAN Sōbee VI (1823–1884)  
KINKŌZAN Sōbee VII (1866–1927)  
**Pair of dishes with maple leaf design** 19th century  
stoneware, enamels  
each 3 x 13.5 cm diameter  
Gift of Charles Binnie 1924 4056, 4067



3

KAFŪ (dates unknown)

**Two girls by the sea** c mid 1920s

framed panel; ink and colour on silk, 87.6 x 115.5 cm

Honolulu Academy of Arts

Purchased with Marjorie Lewis Griffing and Beatrice Watson Parrent Funds, 1994 HAA 7550.1



This enigmatic work features the portraits of two girls, sisters judging from their physiognomy, and an image of two cultural paths facing Japan. One girl wears Western attire and the other wears traditional costume and hairstyle. Such visual comparisons of modernity and tradition were not uncommon in Taishō newspaper and magazine articles. This painting transcends these standard juxtapositions because three boats, symbolising the trajectory of Japan's material evolution are appended to the portraits.

The painting was likely commissioned by the parents of these two girls, with the painter being conscious of showing them in the best possible light and displaying their material sophistication. The elevated social standing of these girls is indicated by their modest deportment and expensive clothing. For a millennium, Japanese aristocratic and samurai elite had commissioned their portraits. With the growth of the business class in Taishō, portraiture became even more popular, providing a lucrative sideline for most painters and the sole income for some portrait specialists. Increasingly, however, painters lost

business to photographers, whose work was cheaper and representations more lifelike.

The two girls' clothing could not differ more. One is clad in the latest Japanese fashion-stylish *furisode* and *obi*, *zōri* sandals and long, braided hair. Her companion is up-to-the-minute in the Western mode – green velvet dress with white lace collar, black Mary Janes, and short hair. The girls are surrounded by flowers and each hold a flower, one red and one white. Symbols of femininity, flowers are a typical accoutrement in *bijinga*.

At the upper right of the composition is an old wooden fishing boat beached on the bank behind the girls. To the left, at the bottom of the embankment, are the sails of a clipper ship – the kind of vessel that brought Western culture to Japan in the sixteenth century and again in the mid nineteenth century. On the horizon, a modern ship steams forward beneath several clouds. These maritime vessels are surely allegorical, representing Japan's traditional culture, the early modern era of Western contact, and the industrialist future.

#### VISUAL ARTS

**Look** closely at the composition of this image. **Focus** on how the figures are framed and the way directional line is used. Where is your eye directed to and why? Also consider the use of colour and how this enhances the overall effect.

**Arrange** a life drawing workshop in your classroom.

**Make** sketches and drawings of two models reading a book. **Use** similar directional line and framing methods that you have observed from this image. **Create** a painting based on your sketches and drawings.

#### SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

**Look** at the different ships and boats in this scene. What do they represent? **Consider** the advancement in technology, the function of the boats and how society has changed as a result.

#### ENGLISH

It is suggested that the girls in this image are reading the story of Chanticleer the rooster. **Find out** about the story, read it in class and discuss why young women may have been encouraged to read this book in Japan at this time.

#### HSIE

**Write** a table of differences between the ways each girl is portrayed. How do they represent traditional and modern Japan? **Think** about how your own image reflects the time in which you live. **Compare** this image of yourself with that of a grandparent when they were your age. **How** are these images different and how are they similar?

#### COLLECTION CONNECTION



KAINOSHO Tadaoto (1894–1978)

#### Beauty looking back c1928

hanging scroll, ink, colour and gilt on paper  
60.3 x 39.5 cm

Purchased 1991 © Kainosho Tadaoto Estate 264.1991

4

ENOMOTO Chikatoshi (1898–1973)  
**Ginza willow** early 1930s  
 hanging scroll; ink and colour on silk  
 116.2 x 36.1 cm  
 Private collection



The woman wearing an evening dress strolls beneath a willow on a summer evening. She carries a fan to cool herself and slips her jacket off one shoulder to reveal a bare arm. The pleated dress reveals her ankles and shins – a display that characterised modern fashion and its values. Willows have a long history as street trees, but in Tokyo, where Enomoto worked, willows were associated with the fashionable Ginza district. More ubiquitous than willows were the fashionable young men and women who paraded Ginza streets to shop, eat, drink, or just to see and be seen. This woman directs her gaze elsewhere, even as she seems intent on being gazed at. The different grey tones of the woman's stockings and dress echo the greys of the

willow trunk and supporting poles. The idea is that the slender woman, 'willow-waisted' in classical parlance, is as elegant yet pliable as the tree beside her.

Cherries and willows were courtesans' emblems – their realm of transient pleasure known euphemistically as the *karyūkai*, or 'cherry and willow world'. The tree provides the women's physical and symbolic contexts. They display themselves in public and for public consumption. The combination of gentility and symbolism gives this painting an underlying tension and its significance in an era when the appearance of fashionable women in public aroused anxiety.

### VISUAL ARTS

**Identify** aspects of the scroll that are typical of Japanese compositional style. **Find** examples in the exhibition showing asymmetry and minimalist qualities. What effect do they have on you, the viewer?

**Make** paper dolls and create traditional and modern Japanese clothing. **Include** accessories and different hair styles.

### HSIE

**Research** where the Ginza district is in Tokyo and why it is famous. **Find** images and display them in the classroom. Where do people go to meet, shop, eat and be seen in your area. **Take** some photographs of these areas and display them as a collage with the images of Ginza.

### SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

After a devastating fire in 1872, the Ginza district was destroyed and rebuilt in the Georgian style by the Irish architect, Thomas Walters. How do you think the impact of this urban design changed the way people worked and spent their leisure time? **Find** images of this area and create a powerpoint presentation for the class.

### DRAMA

**Create** a play about the woman in this scene and who she may be waiting for. **Include** information about the Ginza district in your dialogue. **Incorporate** what it feels like to view and be viewed.

### COLLECTION CONNECTION



TAKEHISA Yumeji (1893–1934)

**Autumn for make-up**

Cover design for *The Ladies' Graphic* 1924

colour woodcut

17.9 x 19.5 cm

Purchased 1991 178.1991





5

**Woman's kimono c1925–50**

silk, plain weave, stencil-printed warp and weft *kasuri*  
155 x 125.7 cm

Honolulu Academy of Arts

Gift of the Christensen Fund, 1998 HAA 10994.1

This most unusual kimono seems to represent, in one sense, a wild release of creative energy through varied abstract forms. Delicate and linear, or angular and strong, numerous motifs are densely gathered against the white background of this kimono. Rather than chaos, they seem to depict the complex order of a science fiction universe. In style, some forms suggest art deco influences which, when brought to Japan, stimulated even the field of kimono design. Are these the forms of tapering towers,

circles, and triangles in pink, blue, red, yellow, and black of the mechanical age? Or are they highly abstracted flower shapes? Does the flowing red form suggest a traditional running-stream motif? And are the multispoked circles explosions of summer fireworks, or dandelion puffs? Whatever these images represent, we can enjoy the profusion of the artist's imagination played out on the fabric of this spring or summer kimono.

#### VISUAL ARTS

**Look** at the variety of kimonos in the exhibition. **Consider** their design and form. How do the folds and motifs create the overall effect? What colours seem to dominate in the design? **Design** and print a repeated pattern on fabric. **Limit** your palette to 3 colours. When your print is complete, fold and drape your design around a model or yourself and comment on how the original motif changes.

**Research** the Spanish artist Miro and compare the patterns he uses in his compositions to those in this kimono design.

#### MUSIC

**Look** at the patterns and forms on the kimono. **Listen** to traditional and modern Japanese music and find music that reflects the mood of this design. **Create** your own piece of music based on your findings.

#### MATHS

**Find out** how kimonos are made. **Measure** your height and body measurements and calculate how much fabric is required to make your own kimono.

#### ENGLISH

This kimono was created for spring or summer. Why are the seasons very significant in Japanese culture?

**Write** a haiku poem on the seasons.

#### COLLECTION CONNECTION



Edo (Tokugawa) period 1615–1868

**Karaori noh robe with design of flowers of the four seasons 1800s**

silk and gold metallic thread supplementary wefts in a silk teill ground, 152.5 x 144 cm

Purchased 2002 321.2002

YAMAKAWA Shūhō (1898–1944)

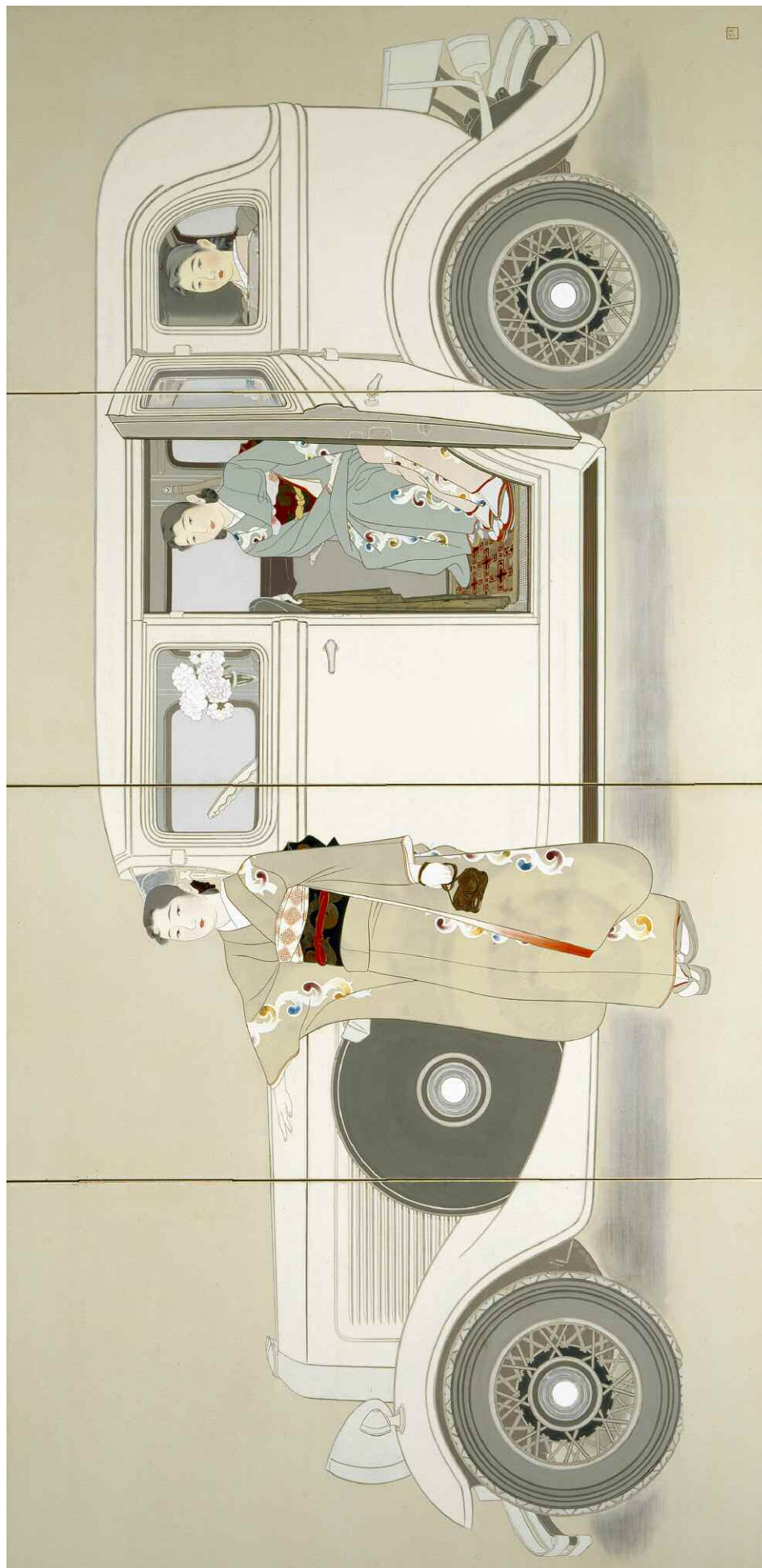
**Three sisters 1936**

four-panel screen; ink and colour on silk, 176 x 333 cm

Honolulu Academy of Arts

Purchased with funds from the Beatrice Watson Parrent Acquisition Fund, 2002

HAA 11822.1





## 6 Three sisters

This quietly dramatic work was first displayed in 1936. It was originally a single two-panel screen, each panel constituting a large square. The monumental geometry of this unusual format underscored the massive power of the luxurious touring car. Although a portrait of three specific women, the work is also a depiction of Japanese femininity. That femininity is reified and complicated by its juxtaposition with the Western auto.

The three sisters (from left to right and from older to younger) are Kaoru, Kimiko and Taeko, the oldest daughters of the industrialist and right-wing politician Kuhara Fusanosuke (1869–1965). After making his fortune in mining, Kuhara founded the Hitachi manufacturing company among other enterprises. The large family lived in luxurious Western and Japanese style accommodation and as part of their social finishing, the three eldest sisters studied painting with Yamakawa Shūhō and it is undoubtedly through this connection that Shūhō came to make this portrait.

The remarkable similarity in the sisters' physiognomy and expression is reinforced by their clothing; all three wear long-sleeved *furisode* kimono and obi with the same

arabesque *karakusa* (Chinese grass) pattern, although in different colours. The sisters' high fashion and aloof expressions are in keeping with the 'classic' elegance of the Chrysler Royal Sedan, with the strong lines and sweeping curves of their kimono reprising the elegant silhouette of the car.

The standing sister dangles a portable camera from her left hand. Covered in a leather case, it is likely one of the new 35mm single-lens reflex models. The camera marks these women as members of the leisure class; it is a symbol of wealth and familiarity of foreign goods and indicates that they are glimpsed here on an outing. The absence of any background, together with the dominant presence of pale colours, makes the painting cool both formally and emotionally.

Shūhō's *Three Sisters* repeats the title of Chekov's famous play of 1901. The play was first performed in Japan in 1932 and portrays the story of Russian upper class sisters searching for meaning in the modern world. Chekov's influence is apparent from the title and similar subject matter presented.

### VISUAL ARTS

Look at each of the four panels individually. Reflect on the lines and shapes you can see. How are these mirrored in the car and the figures? Compare the organic and man-made shapes. List the different textures you can see.

The sisters are on an outing and the standing figure is holding a camera. As a class, go on an outing and document your trip through photography and sketches. Create a large collaborative artwork using the images that you gathered.

### DRAMA/MUSIC

Make up a story about the three sisters and set it to music. Compose your own songs to tell your story. Use traditional and contemporary instruments in your musical compositions.

### PDHPE

Look at the figures and observe body language and expressions. Imagine what the interpersonal relationships are between these sisters. Role-play the different scenarios of how these sisters could get along. Consider and discuss your relationships with different members of your family when you go on a trip together.

### SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Research how cars can be viewed as status symbols. What characteristics do they have? Find examples of prestige cars from 1900 to the present day and chart how size and shape has changed over time.

### COLLECTION CONNECTION



YAMAMURA Toyonari (1886–1942)  
**Shanghai dancers** 1924  
 colour woodcut  
 39.9 x 27.1 cm image; 41.4 x 28.7 cm sheet  
 Purchased 1984 56.1984

## GLOSSARY

**art deco:** style of design popular during the 1920s and 30s.

**bijinga:** pictures of beautiful women.

**hanga:** literally 'plate picture', a word introduced in 1905 to refer to original prints.

**hanging scroll:** a roll of paper, used as a support for painting or writing.

**lacquer:** a material for a kind of sculpture in which layers are built up. It gives any surface it covers a hard, highly polished finish.

**motif:** a distinctive feature or central element in a work of art.

**nihonga:** literally 'Japanese painting'; a modern neo-traditionalist painting style that arose in the Meiji period (1868–1912) as traditional painting schools responded to the challenges of western styles and techniques.

**nostalgia:** a bittersweet longing for things, persons or situations of the past.

**nouveau riche:** a term generally used to emphasise the persons who were previously part of a lower economic or social class.

**ukiyo-e:** literally 'pictures of the floating world', *ukiyo* was originally a Buddhist term referring to the sad, irrelevant and transient nature on this earth – 'the floating world'. By the 17th century it had developed more positive connotations, becoming the ultimate expression of the fleeting pleasures of this world whose very transience heightens our poignant enjoyment. *Ukiyo* was the term used to describe the lifestyle and values of the new urban class that arose in the Edo period (1615–1867) as Japan made the transition from a samurai-based feudal society to a merchant-based modern society. *Ukiyo* culture affected literature, music, theatre and art, creating new forms and transforming old ones. The pictorial artforms depicting this world – both paintings and woodblock prints – are referred to as *ukiyo-e*.

**wood cut:** a relief print made from designs cut into blocks of wood along the grain; also called a woodblock print. The ink is transferred from the raised surfaces when it is pressed onto paper.

## FURTHER READING

L Price and L O'Connor (ed) **Taishō chic: Japanese modernity, nostalgia and deco** catalogue, Honolulu Academy of Arts 2001

J Menzies (ed) **The Asian collections** handbook AGNSW, 2003

**Adventures in Asia**, education kit from the collection of the AGNSW, 2004

**Art speaks Japanese**, Japanese language education kit from the collection of the AGNSW, 2008

This kit is available online.  
[www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/ed/kits](http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/ed/kits)

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Art Gallery Road, Domain, Sydney 2000, Australia  
[pp@ag.nsw.gov.au](mailto:pp@ag.nsw.gov.au)

Below: *Songbook* c1917–24  
Honolulu Academy of Arts Gift of Patricia Salmon, 1994

