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BOOK REVIEW BY REBECCA JENNISON

ART and *Engagement in Early Postwar Japan* and *The Stakes of Exposure: Anxious Bodies in Postwar Japanese Art* are both ambitious and original works that make important contributions to the fields of art history, social history, and cultural and media studies in postwar Japan. Both works build on groundbreaking studies of avant-garde art in Japan and raise questions about the “frame” of discourse on such art in English-language-based studies.¹ At the same time, the approach and methodology of the two authors differ in significant ways.

Jesty looks at the period from 1945 to 1960 in an in-depth exploration of three movements in the early postwar era that set the stage for the emergence of what later came to be called *gendai āto* 現代アート (contemporary art). He argues that a clearer understanding of this dynamic and complex period is critically important, especially one that includes an analysis of critical forms of social engagement that are often associated with left-wing movements sometimes elided from later histories. This is not only for a more complete under-

standing of the past, but also to understand the present.

Kunimoto focuses on two key words—“exposure” and “anxious bodies”—to discuss the work of four artists whose works span the period 1930–1970; the author’s aim is to shed new light on “some of the most visually compelling, politically surprising, and often overlooked” (p. 16) works by these artists, paying close attention to the effects of the changing social context (including media) on their works.

Art and Engagement offers timely and urgent insights into the complexities of the early postwar era. Based on years of research and fieldwork, the volume enables the reader to understand ways in which a range of artistic and cultural practices initiated by collective action and movements during the postwar period are inextricably intertwined with the history of art in that period. This 326-page volume consists of an introduction, four parts that are further divided into fourteen chapters, and an epilogue; two sets of eight color plates provide the reader with quality images that complement the analysis in the text. Jesty’s engaging writing style guides the reader on a journey through the early postwar period where they discover a wealth of new information, including references to important primary sources, interviews, and critical cultural theory.

The introduction begins with a detailed, vivid description of Maruki Iri 丸木位里 (1901–1995) and

¹ See, for example, Tomii, “Historicizing ‘Contemporary Art’ in the 1960s”; Winther-Tamaki, “Oil Painting in Postsurrender Japan”; Munroe, *Japanese Art after 1945*; and Tiampo and Munroe, *Gutai: Splendid Playground*.

Maruki Toshi's 丸木俊 (1912–2000) *Genbaku no zu* 原爆の図 (Atomic Bomb Panels), the first of which appeared in 1950; many more works in the series followed and they were shown in a wide range of locations, mostly outside galleries and museums. Jesty stresses that the works of this series are “filled with people” — references to the human figures in the paintings. He adds that “issues of speech, beckoning and sharing are central to the production and reception of the paintings” (p. 2); he shows that the *Atomic Bomb Panels* are “one part of an expanding network, part of a community and a communication that was only possible to the extent that people sustained it, kept contributing to it, and kept the images visible” (p. 4). Jesty uses this example to set the stage for his argument about the larger project of the study, which he describes as “a cultural history of the relationship between art and politics in a particular place: Japan from 1945 to 1960” (p. 5). His primary goals are to “reframe the history of that moment and its relevance to the present day,” and “to demonstrate a method of examining the relationship between art and politics that approaches art as a mode of intervention, but insists artistic intervention move beyond the idea that the artwork or artist unilaterally authors political significance, to trace how creations and expressive acts may (or may not) actually engage the terms of shared meaning and value” (p. 5). Throughout the volume, Jesty points consistently to artists’ connections to and engagements with communities and issues; in terms of methodology, he elaborates on a range of collaborations that form the underpinnings of the artists’ creative practices as he offers insightful readings of their works.

In the two chapters comprising part 1, “Arts of Engagement and the Democratic Culture of the Early Postwar,” Jesty stresses that artists were not isolated but engaged in diverse ways through circles or other informal forums “outside their usual social roles” (p. 5); he cites the collaborations of Senda Umeji 千田梅二 (1920–1997) and Ueno Eishin 上野英信 (1923–1987), noting that the “seemingly organic relationship among discussion, research, expression and political involvement” is “the most important aspect of the linkage between cultural activity and public participation that characterizes the early postwar’s democratic culture” (p. 28). This perspective is at the core of his analysis of three movements in the early postwar era: reportage art (*ruporutāju kaiga* レポルターージュ絵画), the Society for Creative Aesthetic Education (Sōzō Biiku Kyōkai 想像

美育協会) or Sōbi, and Kyūshū-ha (Group Kyūshū 九州派). This line of inquiry leads Jesty “to relativize and critique the tendency to find the greatest aesthetic value in spontaneity, disruption and immediacy,” or what he calls “a volcanic model of the avant-garde” (p. 34). Here he also draws on the work of Grant Kestor, Shannon Jackson, and Doris Sommer, who propose a different model in which “commitment, organization, goal-directedness, and incremental change” are valued (p. 34).² Jesty’s in-depth research on these three movements that center on the visual arts but have much in common with many cultural groups in the early postwar period, reveals that artists were “devoted both to their artwork and to the task of finding new terms for art and culture’s social existence” (p. 9).

Part 2, “Avant-Garde Documentary: Reportage Art of the 1950s,” is organized into four chapters that trace “theories and practices that would come to define the reportage style” or what Jesty terms “avant-garde realism” (p. 88).³ Jesty shows how this movement emerged in 1950 as “the Cold War heated up in East Asia,” and as “Japan was becoming an ever more important bulwark against communism in East Asia” (p. 55). In the chapters that follow, he undertakes close readings of works by Yamashita Kikuji 山下菊二 (1919–1986), Katsuragawa Hiroshi 桂川宏 (1924–2011), Ikeda Tatsuo 池田龍雄 (b. 1928), and Nakamura Hiroshi 中村宏 (b. 1932), situating them in the context of shifting and increasingly complex developments both in contemporary sociopolitical movements and experimentation with a range of media. Jesty first discusses developments in the late 1940s and early 1950s, carefully delineating the political and cultural context of works like Yamashita’s *Akebono mura monotagari* あけぼの村物語 (The Tale of Akebono Village, 1953). In the first three chapters of the book under discussion he highlights various ways in which the artists engaged in activism and how their activities helped shape their artistic choices. In chapter 6, he goes on to give close readings of works by Yamashita, Ikeda, Katsuragawa, and Nakamura, and finally discusses the shift in Nakamura’s work in the 1960s and 1970s, noting that “Nakamura became concerned with vision as the very thing that needed to be made visible” (p. 120). In a discussion of

2 Kestor, *Conversation Pieces*; Jackson, *Social Works*; Sommer, *The Work of Art in the World*.

3 See also Jesty, “The Realism Debate.”

works that are also treated by Namiko Kunimoto in the other monograph under discussion here, Jesty notes that the artist's evolving interest in machines led him to a "vision of vision as something which pulls people into the thrall of the nation and the operations of commercial culture" (p. 121). While acknowledging the shift away from "reportage" art, Jesty ends with observations about ways in which "avant-garde realism and the project of reportage resonates with some of the art and film of the 1960s," thus situating "reportage" more firmly in the picture of postwar art in Japan (p. 123).

In part 3, "Opening Open Doors: Sōbi and Hani Susumu," Jesty draws extensively on primary materials cited in four chapters to discuss the work of film director Hani Susumu 羽仁進 (b. 1928) and Sōbi. He gives a detailed account of how Sōbi, "a grassroots movement comprised at its base by local study groups of teachers" (p. 133) that was founded by Kubo Sadajiro 久保貞次郎 (1909–1996), and other early postwar movements such as Asocio de Artistas Demokrat (Association of Democratic Artists) founded in 1951 by Ei-Kyū 瑛九 (1911–1960) played an important role in redefining art education and innovative art practices in the postwar period. Through a discussion of two artists, Ay-O 愛嘔 (b. 1931) and Saitō Takako 齋藤陽子 (b. 1929), members of the Demokrat and Sōbi groups respectively, Jesty highlights ways in which the educational philosophy of these groups influenced the work of these artists who later became active in the Fluxus movement, an avant-garde art movement started in 1963 by George F. Maciunas. Jesty adds valuable new information to the story of these innovative artists who left Japan to join Fluxus in New York.⁴ Jesty concludes that although Sōbi's aim was to develop and spread an "idealistic vision of a society that celebrated individual exploration and creativity," that vision was ultimately "undermined by bureaucratic demands to administer education and democracy" (p. 196).

In part 4, "Kyushu-ha Tartare: Anti-Art Between Raw and Haute," Jesty's aim is to revisit discussions about "the end of the avant-garde 前衛 (*zen'ei*) in this period and the consolidation of another paradigm, the contemporary (*gendai*)" (p. 195). He writes, "At stake was a replacement of historically, narratively articulated social movements (of a mostly left wing variety) with

a spatially expansive, non-developing flux of international contemporaneity (*kokusaiteki dōjisei*)" (p. 195).⁵ Jesty argues that Kyushu-ha is a group that "does not fit anywhere easily" (p. 196), one that was "born partly out of the communal, enlightened spirit of popular participation that was so characteristic of the 1950s," but "was also subject to the emerging field of contemporary art that would structure the art world of the 1960s and later" (p. 196). Situated between three worlds—circles, established art societies, and the emergent field of contemporary art—Kyushu-ha was "on the edge of two formations of culture, with little hope of becoming a mass movement, but also unable to adapt itself to an increasingly professionalized and internationalized art field" (p. 196). Jesty's aim is to use this position "to shed light on and question the worlds themselves rather than the other way around" (p. 196). What we learn from this, Jesty argues, is that the shift to a more professionalized and internationalized art world fostered conditions in which "Actually ignoring the institutions of contemporary art, or developing a substantial critique in the form of wholly alternate accounts of value, results in being ignored" (p. 218).

Jesty's aim in this study is not to consolidate a linear (and progressive) historical narrative of three movements that ultimately fall behind mainstream movements, but through looking at these movements, to "revisit the issue of contemporary art as an institutional paradigm" (p. 197). In "Epilogue: Hope in the Past and the Future," he returns to his opening question concerning "art as intervention," and presses the reader to continue thinking outside the frame of contemporary art. He also notes that when he began the project in 2005, he did not feel as acutely as he does now that it is closely linked to events and trends unfolding in the present moment. Jesty writes, "The sense that our lives and our world are at a precarious moment of major historical change grows ever more intense and discomforting. The intensity and scale of the crisis now approaches what I imagine people in the 1950s saw themselves confronting" (p. 267). Jesty gives the last word to writer, historian and activist Rebecca Solnit who reminds us that "telling this history is part of helping people navigate toward the future" (p. 256).⁶

In *The Stakes of Exposure: Anxious Bodies in Postwar*

4 See also Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*; especially her chapter "Playful Spirit: The Interactive Art of Takako Saito."

5 See also Tomii, "Historicizing Contemporary Art."

6 See Solnit, *Hope in the Dark*.

Japanese Art, Namiko Kunimoto takes a different approach to look at the history of art and cultural politics in postwar Japan. The work also provides a rich body of information about selected artists active in the period. Like Jesty, Kunimoto's aim is to broaden the discussion of English-language studies in the field that have tended to focus on the "interventionist" avant-garde artists whose works began to attract attention in the international media in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Works by the four artists who are the focus of the study—Katsura Yuki 桂ゆき (1913–1991), Nakamura Hiroshi 中村宏 (b. 1932), Tanaka Atsuko 田中敦子 (1932–2005), and Shiraga Kazuo 白髪一雄 (1924–2008)—span the decades between 1930 to 1970. As the title suggests, Kunimoto's aims are to examine "the stakes of exposure" through looking at selected works by these artists, to highlight questions of gender and representation, and to explore links between the art and broader forms of visual culture, or "visual aspects of political history" (p. 4) prevalent at the time.

This 263-page volume consists of an introduction, four parts, and a conclusion, and includes thirty-four color plates of the artworks and dozens of black and white figures that include such materials as Katsura Yuki's illustrations of James Baldwin's novel, *Another Country*, Nakamura Hiroshi's *Jogakusei* 女学生 (Schoolgirl) scrapbooks, and sketches by Tanaka Atsuko and Shiraga Kazuo. In the conclusion, Kunimoto also includes images of such popular manga as *Omoitsuki fujin* 思ひつき夫人 (Conscientious housewife) by Hirai Fusando 平井房人 (1903–1960) and Burondi ブロンディ (Blondie) by Chic Young (1901–1973)—popular in the 1930s and resurrected in the early postwar period—thus expanding the range of research materials to include popular media and culture. Kunimoto's aim is "to reveal the disorienting diversity of aesthetic strategies, examining rather than obscuring the contradictions at play in this moment of heightened creative production" (p. 18).

In "Introduction: Gendered Bodies and the Minamata Disaster," Kunimoto begins with images of two young female Minamata disease patients, Matsunaga Kumiko 松永久美子 (1950–1974) and Isayama Takako 諫山孝子 (b. 1961), taken by photojournalists Kuwabara Shisei 桑原史成 (b. 1936) and W. Eugene Smith (1918–1978). She cites a diverse range of media in which these images appeared, arguing that "events such as the Minamata disaster reveal that hard-and-fast distinc-

tions between 'art' and 'visual culture' are unsustainable," and that "the Minamata disease unfolded across different media in a manner that heightened anxieties about bodily exposure in postwar Japan" (p. 4). These examples alert the reader to the author's ambitious aim to include many examples of visual culture in the study, but this reader would have been helped by a more thorough discussion of how the author intends us to read these images in relation to the question of "gender and nation" and to the analysis in later chapters.

Kunimoto also cites a range of important theoretical works on gender and representation, and draws on previous studies by William Marotti and Bert Winther-Tamaki that explore a range of questions about postwar artists' practices and their engagement with "discourses on gender and nationhood."⁷ She writes, "I examine how political contention over Japan's new democracy (including tension between Japan and the United States) was expressed, disavowed, and reimagined through representations of the gendered body. How could the body be represented in postwar Japan? Why did artists often represent the body as under duress, fragmented, covered or disaggregated?" (p. 15).

Kunimoto's approach to analyzing the four artists whose works are at the center of each of the four following chapters (Katsura, Nakamura, Tanaka, and Shiraga) is to build on existing research on these artists, and to highlight the connections that each artist developed in their practices that linked their works to a wide range of new media emerging in the postwar era, including news, popular advertising, fashion, technology, television, and manga.

In chapter 1, "Katsura Yuki's Bodies of Resistance," Kunimoto argues that by "experimenting with exposure and concealment of the body through allegory and material layering, Katsura reoriented aesthetic-political sensibility and disrupted forms of belonging, thereby fostering wider discourse on gender and nationhood in Japan" (p.23). For example, Kunimoto discusses Katsura's mass-culture illustrations and the artist's assemblage paintings, arguing that "these satirical allegories evaded the overdetermined masculine heroics of abstract expressionism and action art that had taken Japan by storm in the postwar period, forging an in-

7 Marotti, *Money, Trains, and Guillotines*, p. 2; Winther-Tamaki, "Oil Painting in Postsurrender Japan"; Tiampo, "Body, War and the Discourses of History."

novative mode of expression that was whimsical and strange in its tone but nonetheless had a potent political thrust” (p. 18). Kunimoto’s reading of Katsura’s works reveals connections with other media such as book illustrations and the world of fashion design.

In chapter 2, “Nakamura Hiroshi and the Politics of Embodiment,” Kunimoto acknowledges the attention Nakamura has received for his earlier reportage works, but aims to expand our understanding of this artist by looking more closely at how the male body was “exiled” from his work in the 1960s and replaced by “masculinized machinery.”⁸ Drawing on the artist’s *Jogakusei* scrapbooks, and discussing a number of the works that are also discussed by Jesty, Kunimoto argues that “From the 1960s onward, he simultaneously critiqued and participated in the visual culture of the schoolgirl fetish that perpetuated sexist consumption, employing visual signs of movement both to provoke the viewer and to secure a masculine viewing position within the picture” (p. 111).

In chapter 3, “Tanaka Atsuko and the Circuits of Subjectivity,” Kunimoto situates the pivotal performance pieces by this artist, *Denki fuku* 電気服 (Electric Dress, 1956) and *Butai fuku* 舞台服 (Stage Clothes, 1956) in the context of the industrial transformation of Osaka and the shifting status of women in society, arguing that “Tanaka’s art explored subjectivity as a process reliant on visual signifiers, bodily performance and the context of industrialization, urbanization and the encroachment of technology into all aspects of everyday life” (p. 20). Kunimoto also touches on questions concerning gender dynamics both in terms of the critical response to Tanaka’s works and the dynamics within the Gutai group (Gutai Bijutsu Kyōkai 具体美術教会), an avant-garde art group based in the Kansai area. Her comparison between Katsura Yuki’s and Tanaka Atsuko’s comments on fashion suggest interesting possibilities for further inquiry (p. 130). Throughout the chapter, Kunimoto raises a number of interesting questions about Tanaka’s artworks, gender, and subjectivity. She also notes that Tanaka was “one of a small minority of women artists in Japan” (p. 134) but that “Tanaka and other female members of the Gutai were given ample space in exhibitions and in the pages of *Gutai*, the group’s newsletter” (p. 134). This discussion resonates with work by other scholars, such as Reiko

8 See Hoagland, *ANPO: Art X War*.

Kokatsu, Midori Yoshimoto, and Alicia Volk, who continue to explore gender dynamics in artists’ groups and their effect on women artists in Japan.⁹

Kunimoto concludes that “As the visibility of women’s bodies skyrocketed in advertising, *Electric Dress* offered an alternative visualization of the female body, one that neither collaborated with the commercialized female body nor affirmed it as empowered” (p. 130), and that this pivotal work “displays gender subjectivity as unstable and uncertain rather than declaratively individualistic” (p. 145).

In chapter 4, Kunimoto focuses on the work of Shiraga Katsuo, particularly his engagement with “heroic violence.” Shiraga’s references to archetypal models of the hero appear frequently in the work. As Kunimoto writes, “Shiraga’s compositions and his persona as an artist were fraught with concern over the role of the hero” or the “performative male posturing that expresses a sense of power through the stance and gesturing of the male body” (pp. 150–51). Kunimoto’s reading of such works as *Doro ni idomu* 泥に挑む (Challenging Mud, 1955), *Dōzo ohairi kudasai* どうぞお入りください (Please Come In, 1955), and her discussion of Shiraga’s interpretation of *The Water Margin* (a fourteenth-century classic Chinese novel with 108 heroes), as well as Shiraga’s own Buddhist practice and initiation into the rigorous, ascetic Tendai Shugendō practice on Mt. Hiei, lead her to conclude that “On and off the stage, Shiraga’s strategic performances revealed that art might be used to question what the state could be and what role the artist-hero might have within that field, just as his violent actions molded and shaped his own body into one that enacted and idealized the trope of the masculine artist-hero” (p. 181).

The conclusion, “Thresholds of Exposure,” takes the reader one step further, citing Judith Butler’s theory of gender and performance in a discussion of three manga, *Omoitsuki fujin* and *Burondi*, both noted above, and *Sazae-san* サザエさん by Hasegawa Machiko 長谷川町子 (1920–1992) as examples of “hegemonic mainstream media” (p. 183) of the period that can be considered relevant to the works of the artists discussed in her study. Kunimoto writes, “While one might read these comics as presenting gender roles as stable, homoge-

9 Kokatsu, “Avant-garde Movements after World War II and Japanese Women Artists, 1950s–1960s”; Yoshimoto, “A Woman and Collectives”; Volk, “Katsura Yuki and the Japanese Avant-Garde.”

neous, and defined by familial bonds and obligations, the multiple opposing narratives and the freighted representational variations between the comics implied transition and uncertainty, a tone that was often conveyed in the anxious bodies created by Katsura, Nakamura, Tanaka and Shiraga” (p. 183). While this raises new and interesting questions, my sense is that a much more careful and in-depth analysis with attention to the burgeoning amount of literature on gender and manga studies that has emerged in recent years would be required to answer them.

In conclusion, both books provide rich sources of new knowledge, explore new territory, and provide fresh insights that will spark further discussion in the field. In *Art and Engagement in Early Postwar Japan*, Justin Jesty consistently focuses on uncovering the connections between avant-garde artists’ engagement with a range of communities and social practices and their artistic and aesthetic choices. Jesty’s project points the way to new methodologies that help us broaden, deepen, and rethink the framework of postwar art in Japan. As Bert Tamaki-Winther writes in a comment on the book’s jacket, the book “offers a persuasive revision of the historiography of the postwar period, and challenges us to rethink the basic premises of radical art.” For this reader, the study is very helpful in suggesting new directions and intersections with recent discussions about transnational and transpacific art practices in the postwar and Cold War periods and with emerging dialogues on “socially engaged art.”¹⁰

Taking a rather different approach, Namiko Kunimoto’s *The Stakes of Exposure: Anxious Bodies in Postwar Japanese Art* also ambitiously raises a range of important questions and broadens previous research on the four artists studied in significant ways. At the same time, the author’s broad aims and references to a wide range of theoretical materials left me wondering whether she could have engaged more selectively and deeply with the texts most pertinent to her argument. She could then more carefully delineate the connections between them and the works of the artists discussed. It should also be noted that, in a number of places, the numbering for notes in the text and the endnotes are out of sync.

I have no doubt that the rich body of new information and challenging questions raised by *Art and En-*

agement and *The Stakes of Exposure* will enrich and enliven discussions in the field. Both books provide valuable lists of sources and introduce or point to materials in Japanese that have not previously been accessible to English readers. These volumes will not only be of interest to specialists, but will also make valuable additions to syllabi in courses on postwar art history, social history, and gender and media studies. These works will make significant contributions at a time when a deeper understanding of this complex period in history appears to be increasingly important.

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