

EXHIBITION FACT SHEET

JAPANESE MODERNISM

NGV INTERNATIONAL

28 FEBRUARY – 4 OCTOBER 2020

This fact sheet provides information specific to the *Japanese Modernism* exhibition to support study of Studio Arts – Art Industry Contexts Unit 4 Outcome 3. For a more detailed overview of exhibition preparation, presentation, conservation and promotion at the NGV refer to *Studio Arts: Art industry contexts at the NGV*.¹



Preparing to go out marks the entrance to *Japanese Modernism*. Women's kimono ensembles can be seen to the right of the entrance.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

During the first half of the twentieth century Japan experienced significant social, economic, technological, cultural, art and design change. *Japanese Modernism* offers unique insight into this period, capturing the confidence and vibrant spirit of a rapidly evolving country and its exuberant youth. Many of these works are being exhibited in Australia for the first time, having been acquired over a period of five years for the NGV's collection of Japanese art.

KEY ARTISTS

Japanese artists and designers from 1920s through to the 1940s, including:

- Taniguchi Fumie, *Preparing to go out*, 1935, six panel folding screen: ink and water-colour on silk, lacquer on wood
- Negishi Ayako, *Waiting for makeup*, 1938, coloured inks on paper
- Saeki Shunkō, *Tea and coffee salon Sabō*, 1939, ink, colour, paper, lacquer
- Hisui Sugiura, *The first subway in the east*, 1927, colour lithograph

NUMBER AND TYPE OF WORKS

Over 190 multi-disciplinary works including paintings, woodblock and lithographic prints, posters and graphic design including tourist brochures and magazine covers, decorative arts, and fashion.



A view of the exhibition that displays an assortment of objects and artworks including women's fashion ensembles, prints, decorative arts and Negishi Ayako's painting, *Waiting for makeup* (1938)

KEY TEAM MEMBERS

Exhibition Curators: Wayne Crothers (NGV Senior Curator Asian Art) and Annika Aitken (NGV Assistant Curator Asian Art)

Exhibition designer: Nguyen Le

Exhibition conservator: Three conservators with material specialties and a coordinating conservator who has oversight for broad conservation concerns such as gallery conditions.

- Mary-Jo Lelyveld, Co-ordinating Conservator
- Ruth Shervington, Senior Conservator, Paper
- Skye Firth, Senior Conservator, Textiles
- Marika Strohschnieder, Senior Conservator, Objects

CURATORIAL RATIONALE

The curators wish to immerse the visitor in Japan during a brief window between the destruction caused by the 1923 Great Kanto earthquake and the Pacific War (1942–45). During this time, the Japanese cities of Tokyo and Osaka developed into vibrant and modern metropolises. The streets were bustling with glamorous department stores, fashionable cafes, popular movie theatres, swinging dance halls and high-tech transportation.

A lively consumer culture took hold of the country. Innovative and affordable fashion commodities such as kimono and accessories were eagerly acquired by an ever-growing population of socially and financially liberated women. Catering to a new generation of confident and fashionable youth, this period of development represented the arrival of modernity in Asia.

In the exhibition, the visitor is introduced to Japanese creativity and innovation from the modernist period. Women and men's fashion, paintings, prints, decorative arts, moving images and graphic design show the willingness and daring of local artists and designers to bring together traditional Japan and the world of the modern era. The curators particularly note exceptional yet under-recognised women artists and leading avant-garde designers and illustrators of the era.

In the Gallery

- How do the works chosen and the way they are arranged reflect the curatorial rationale?
- How does the exhibition layout enhance your understanding of themes and ideas?
- What was done to prepare and present key works?
- What measures have been taken to support and protect works?

SELECTED WORKS

**PREPARING TO GO OUT, 1935**

Preparing to go out is a six-panel folding Japanese screen that exemplifies the life and times of 'Moga' (short for 'modern girls') who were the generation of young and socially liberated women of the era living in vibrant metropolises such as Tokyo and Osaka. The transition from traditional to modern lifestyles is evident in the array of fashionable outfits, hairstyles and accessories modelled by each of the women as they prepare to head out independently to destinations of their choice in style and confidence. Taniguchi Fumie was the epitome of the modern girl herself, painting *Preparing to go out* at just 25. She attained great success in Japan in the 1930's as a female artist in a male-dominated field.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Reflecting its importance for the exhibition, *Preparing to go out* is the first work visitors experience upon entering the exhibition space. The screen sits on a platform at a height conducive to maximum visibility for visitors. The platform also provides protection, creating a distance between the work and the audience without a case or a physical barrier. This allows the screen to be presented in an open environment as it would have originally been displayed.

In addition to a reminder to not touch the screen, the platform includes the label, eliminating the need for text next to or around the work. This leaves the curved wall free of any detail that would detract from viewing the screen. Whilst in transit and/or storage the screen rests, folded, in a container similar to a Solander box.

Taniguchi Fumie

Preparing to go out 1935 (*Yosou hitobito*)
 six panel folding screen: ink and watercolour on silk
 176.8 x 364.0 cm
 National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
 Purchased with funds from the Estate of Kevin
 and Eunice McDonald and NGV Foundation, 2019
 2019.21
 © Estate of Taniguchi Fumie


JAPANESE

Kimono with geometric modernist design and accessories (1930s)
 silk, cotton, wool, straw, wood, vinyl, plastic and metal
 (a) 106.8 x 63.8 cm (kimono)
 National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
 Purchased with funds donated by Allan Myers AC and Maria Myers AC, 2016
 2016.108

KIMONO WITH GEOMETRIC MODERNIST DESIGN AND ACCESSORIES (1930s)

This ensemble includes a women's *kimono*, *obi* sash, *obi* brooch, handbag, platformed *geta* sandals and hairpins. It reflects the modernization of textile production and development in trends and movements in women's fashion from the time. Once expensive and labour intensive, changes in techniques (such as mechanised weaving, synthetic threads and coloring) made these traditional garments more affordable for a market of 'Moga' with keen eyes for modern colours and patterns. Accessories were also fashioned from new materials such as Bakelite plastic which was more affordable than the precious materials (such as jade, ivory and gold) which were previously used.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

The presentation of this ensemble reflects of the consumer experience in Japanese department stores in 1930's Japan. The tiered platform guides the viewer's eyes around the display, encouraging the viewer to take in the myriad of coordinated patterns and details. Some of the smaller accessories have been placed inside clear acrylic cases to protect and conserve them. The cases also mirror glass cabinets which commonly display valuable jewelry and accessories in department stores.

The handbag, *kimono*, *obi* sash and *obi* brooch are displayed without casing for a more engaging viewing experience. Some objects are suspended from the ceiling by wiring systems and the *kimono* is hanging on transparent acrylic tubing. This hanging system is nearly invisible, creating a sense that the objects are floating. Extra considerations for protection of the exposed objects include signage reminding visitors to not touch the objects and security personnel in the space. To minimize the risk of the handbag being moved, it has been gently clamped to the shelving system.

Coordinating colours and patterns in traditional outfits is very important in Japanese culture. To ensure that these objects were coordinated correctly, curators consulted vintage *kimono* specialists in Tokyo on how to best group and display the arrangement.



Hisui Sugiura
The first subway in the East
 colour lithograph
 91.0 x 62.0 cm
 National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
 Purchased NGV Foundation, 2018
 2018.1504
 © Estate of Hisui Sugiura

THE FIRST SUBWAY IN THE EAST, 1927

Sugiura Hisui's iconic poster proudly states, 'The only subway in the East' and 'Service between Ueno and Asakusa has started'. Regarded as the leader of modern Japanese graphic design, Sugiura uses dramatic diminishing point perspective to create the feeling of arrival as the train approaches the station platform. In the foreground, a young girl holding a teddy bear points to the train's approach and an excited group of men and women are dressed in contemporary fashion, as they are about to be transported into the future by this new mode of transportation. In contrast, several women in the distance are wearing kimono with traditional hairstyles, alluding to the past.

Sugiura was the pioneer of modern Japanese graphic design and a large holding of his work is held at the Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo (MoMAT). His work finely articulates the key ideas of artistic and technological innovation of the era.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

This work is securely fixed to a temporary wall with many works on paper. It is part of a group of graphic works hung at various heights and placed in cases to give access to diverse audiences such as children and wheelchair users. Simulating a tourist bureau's offerings, travel brochures fill the walls and showcase the growing tourism industry in Japan. The viewer is lured to places such as Kyoto, Mt Fuji, shrines, temples, castles and snow sports in the Japanese Alps. The works are protected by acrylic covers which provide a modern and contemporary take on the traditional framing system. They also allow visitors to closely inspect *The first subway in the East* without risk of touching or damaging it.

Given many of the artworks in this exhibition are light-sensitive, such as the posters, prints, magazines, brochures and textiles, the light levels were kept in the lower range recommended by museums. When there are no visitors in the gallery, lights are turned off to limit unnecessary light exposure and during the extended closure periods, works are covered with cloth to protect them from dust. When not on display, the work is stored and transported in a solander box.



CUT GLASS TUMBLERS, c.1930

Cut glass was introduced to Japan during the early nineteenth century and refined with production techniques from France and Britain during the early twentieth century. During the next few decades, European designs merged with Japanese botanical inspired or geometric motifs resulting in a vibrant array of glassware in the modernist style. The ninety tumblers on display emphasise the idea of mass production and the extraordinary range of design motifs from the period.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

The curators provide a special moment in the exhibition to showcase various art and design enterprises such as early 20th century Japanese glassware. The large inset case is designed to surprise the viewer as they turn the corner, when the balanced arrangement of coloured glassware is revealed. Internal and external bright lighting is used to highlight the translucent colour, shape and pattern of each glass. The tumblers are enclosed in a cabinet and supported on an unobtrusive metal shelf, providing both safety and clear access for the viewer.

Conservators and art installers moved the glassware from their acid free cardboard boxes to the shelves while wearing nitrile gloves. These provide better grip than cotton ones, which is especially important for handling fragile glass. Museum wax holds each glass safely on the shelf, providing stability and countering any movement caused by vibration.

Several glasses had minor cracks which needed to be repaired were first cleaned with deionised water, and then with ethanol to dry the surface. Cracks were consolidated with a special conservation grade epoxy resin that doesn't yellow over time. Its optical properties mean that sometimes the crack can disappear completely from the treatment.

Cut glass tumblers
 c. 1930 Japan glass
 (wheel-cut)
 Gift of Mitsushige Horiuchi, 2018
 2016.1062.a-sss 2018.1609.1-17

EXHIBITION DESIGN

The walls are painted grey and white using Dulux colours Tranquil Retreat and Lexicon Quarter. These neutral and subtle shades create an ambience, aid focus on the artworks and permit light to gently filter through the space. The natural wood grain flooring of the Gallery is an important traditional Japanese aesthetic element so was kept without change.

Three temporary walls in a 'H' shape sit in the centre, allowing for more exhibiting opportunities and intimate spaces to view small works. The design adds structure within the gallery, dividing it into curatorial sections and creating a sense of journey for the visitor. The curved wall behind Taniguchi's *Preparing to go out* is both an aesthetic device to encourage focus on the plinthed key work and a marker for the exhibition entrance. Throughout the exhibition, numerous works are displayed on plinths. These break up the floor area and permit full viewing access, particularly for children or wheelchair users.



Bench seating has been placed between the inset displaying the assortment of glass tumblers and cinematic footage projected on the opposite wall (not pictured). The bench has been designed to align with the form, colour and overall aesthetic of the space and to aid viewing of both the glass tumblers and the cinematic footage.

Both the women's and men's fashion sections replicate early twentieth century Japanese department stores aesthetics. Several men's *haori* are shown inside out to reveal the intricate and contemporary designs of the era that otherwise would have been hidden underneath a dark and plain outward layer. A comparison between the women's and men's section indicates a considerable visual contrast in preferences in colour, style and pattern.



In the Gallery

- How does the exhibition design impact the audience appreciation and understanding of the work/theme of the exhibition?
- How does it support the curator's vision?

The temporary 'H' shape wall configuration as seen from the back of the exhibition space. This helps to define the thematic sections and provides additional hanging and display space.

EXHIBITION PROMOTION

Recognised as one of the representational images of the era Hisui Sugiura's *The first subway in the East* is one of the hero images for the exhibition. Being such a valued work and painted by a young progressive Moga of the era, *Preparing to go out* has also been displayed with promotional material (refer to Selected Artworks for more about these works). The images feature in exhibition promotion from the NGV marketing and media teams through a media release, social media and multimedia outputs on the NGV website, NGV Channel and YouTube².

Following the Gallery's temporary closure due to COVID-19 restrictions, NGV made *Japanese Modernism* more accessible online via a self-directed virtual tour on NGV Channel³, and a 30-minute curator-led walkthrough video⁴.

The exhibition was promoted via onsite screens and signage, through the NGV website, social media, NGV eNews and What's On guides. It was reviewed by content producers across print and digital media such as *The Monthly*⁵ and *Broadsheet*⁶. Search 'Japanese Modernism' online to find more.

Japanese Modernism was also promoted on ABC Radio National's *Blueprint* where Jonathan Green interviewed curator Wayne Crothers about the exhibition⁷.

In the Gallery

- What is the mood and feel of the exhibition?
- How does the hero image represent the show?
- What are the messages communicated about the exhibition?

NOTES

- 1 National Gallery of Victoria, 'Studio Arts: Art Industry Contexts at the NGV', 2020, NGV, Victorian Government, <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/school_resource/studio-arts-art-industry-contexts-at-the-ngv/>.
- 2 Refer to:
 - National Gallery of Victoria, 'Japanese Modernism', 2020, NGV, Victorian Government, <<https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/exhibition/japanese-modernism/>>, accessed 7 August 2020.
Japanese Modernism exhibition page including exhibition labels and didactics.
 - National Gallery of Victoria, 'Media Release: Japanese Modernism', 2020, NGV, Victorian Government, <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/media_release/japanese-modernism-3/>, accessed 7 Aug 2020.
 - National Gallery of Victoria, 'Japanese Modernism', 2020, *Vimeo*, <<https://vimeo.com/394100356>>, accessed 7 August 2020.
 - National Gallery of Victoria, 'Japanese Modernism', 2020, YouTube, <<https://youtu.be/fMC1UgkqMLg>>, accessed 7 August 2020.
- 3 National Gallery of Victoria, 'Virtual Tours: Japanese Modernism', 2020, NGV, Victorian Government, <<https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/virtual-tours/japanese-modernism/>>, accessed 7 August 2020.
- 4 National Gallery of Victoria, 'Watch | Exhibition tour – Japanese Modernism', 2020, NGV, Victorian Government, <<https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/multimedia/exhibition-tour-japanese-modernism/>>, accessed 7 August 2020.
Curator led tour of Japanese Modernism with Wayne Crothers and Annika Aitken.
- 5 Miriam Cosic, 'Japanese Modernism', 2020, *The Monthly*, Schwartz Media, <<https://www.themonthly.com.au/blog/miriam-cosic/2020/05/2020/1588635526/japanese-modernism#mtr>>, accessed 11 August 2020.
- 6 Elizabeth Flux, 'Japanese Modernism', 2020, *Broadsheet*, Broadsheet Media, <<https://www.broadsheet.com.au/melbourne/event/japanese-modernism>>, accessed 11 August 2020.
- 7 Jonathan Green, 'The history of Japanese Modernism', 2020, *Blueprint*, ABC, <<https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/blueprintforliving/the-history-of-japanese-modernism/12050338>>, accessed 7 August 2020.
Wayne Crothers, Senior Curator Asian Art, speaks with Jonathan Green about the exhibition within the gallery space.

FURTHER RESOURCES

- Chiho Sumido, 'Rediscovering Fumie Taniguchi', 2020, NGV, Victorian Government, <<https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/essay/rediscovering-fumie-taniguchi/>>, accessed 7 August 2020.
An essay by Chiho Sumida, taken from NGV publication She Persists.
- Wayne Crothers, 'Japanese modernism: between earthquake and war', 2020, NGV, Victorian Government, <<https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/essay/japanese-modernism-between-earthquake-and-war/>>, accessed 7 August 2020.
Essay by Wayne Crothers, Senior Curator Asian Art.
- National Gallery of Victoria 2020, *Explore Conservation*, NGV Conservation, <<https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/conservation/explore-conservation/>>, accessed 7 August 2020.

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