

Representations of Female Image in the Kyoto School during the Taisho period - Sensualism and Realism -

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This paper will discuss the development of the so-called Bijinga, 'paintings of beautiful women', which labeled as decadent in their pursuit of sensual beauty, became popular in Kyoto during the Taisho period. Kyoto's Bijinga are typically represented works by Sh?en UEMURA, widely known for their portrayal of chaste women with integrity. However, as verified in recent years by the art movement of modern Kyoto School and the Association for the Creation of National Painting, there evidently was a unique development of representations of female images with characteristics demonstrating aesthetic tendencies and socialistic realism.

Many of the artists who presented new types of Bijinga were so-called Gakk?-ha artists who were incubated under modern art education at the Kyoto Municipal Special School of Painting. With focus on the activities of these artists, this paper will investigate the extent of influence the modernization of art education in the Kyoto School had on the production of artists, and thereby search for the answers to the birth of expressions differing from the idealized perception of women represented by Sh?en's work.

Backed with modernized art training that adopted Western concept of art and the epochal atmosphere of freedom in the Taisho era that respected individuality, artists broke away from traditional non-individualistic expressions to pursue their own original portrayal of women. In the beginning, many artists were stimulated by the realism possessed by Western art, and by adopting that in their representations of women, they were able to break free from stereotypical expression of Ukiyoe and attempted to produce portrayals of women with more presence. However, the Gakk?-ha artists were not satisfied simply with realistic expressions; they went on to harness the decorative and deformation nature within Japanese traditional paintings and headed toward depicting the mysteriousness and the women psyche that lie beyond realism. It can be said that representations of women that pursued sensual beauty and regarded as decadent were one of the fruitions of the revolutionary movement of Japanese paintings during the Taisho era that aimed at the fusing of Oriental and Western artistic expressions.