

May 17

## **Women Artists in Pre-War and Post-War Japan: Their Social Environment, Education, and Evaluation**

**KOKATSU Reiko**

During the Meiji period through the early Shōwa era, when Japan opened to the world and pursued modernization, it was rare to hear the names or see the works of female artists. But does this mean that women artists did not exist at the time? Starting from this simple question, I organized the exhibition *Japanese Women Artists Before and After World War II: 1930s–1950s* in 2001 at the Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Fine Arts, where I was serving as curator. The exhibition featured 137 works by 48 artists across various media, including Western-style painting, Japanese painting, and photography. This clearly demonstrated that women artists were active—but they had been forgotten, omitted from canonical art history.

The reasons for their erasure cannot be attributed solely to individual limitations, but must also be understood in the context of the patriarchal social systems and gendered restrictions on education in Japan at the time. The family system codified in the Meiji Civil Code reinforced a patriarchal hierarchy in which men, as heads of households, held authority, making it extremely difficult for women to pursue independent careers, let alone become professional artists. Additionally, stark class divisions in pre-war Japan limited access to education in general, and especially to art education, to those from relatively affluent backgrounds.

In this male-dominated society, the education system was fundamentally designed for men. Without the permission of their father or elder brothers, women had little access to higher education, including the arts. The Tokyo School of Fine Arts, established by the Ministry of Education in 1889 (now Tokyo University of the Arts), did not admit women; coeducation was only introduced after Japan's defeat in 1946. Prior to that, the only institution providing higher education in the arts specifically for women was the Women's Art School, founded in 1900 (now Joshibi University of Art and Design). The predecessor of Kyoto City University of Arts—the Kyoto School of Painting—also barred female students until 1945, though it made a few exceptions during the Meiji period under its earlier name, Kyoto Prefectural School of Painting.

This presentation introduces the activities of women artists who, lacking formal educational opportunities, studied in private art schools or studios led by male artists, and submitted their works to official exhibitions organized by the government or male-dominated art associations. These women faced discriminatory treatment within such associations and were often denied

full membership, prompting them to form their own collectives and host independent exhibitions. Many of these groups were short-lived, and during the war, in February 1943, the "Women Artists' Public Service Corps" was established and eventually absorbed into the government's war efforts.

After Japan's defeat, directives from the Allied General Headquarters (GHQ) promoted gender equality, leading to coeducation in art universities and the admission of women into art associations. However, the structure of the art world itself changed: large group exhibitions gave way to juried shows sponsored by newspapers, the Japan Independents Exhibition, and the postwar network of national and prefectural art museums. Avant-garde collectives also emerged in cities beyond Tokyo, such as Osaka and Fukuoka. Yet, women's participation in these circles was not necessarily evaluated on equal terms with men's.

While this presentation cannot provide exhaustive detail, it is important to acknowledge that the efforts of pre-war women artists—who persevered under intense gender discrimination—laid critical groundwork for the next generation. These women, now largely forgotten, did not vanish after the war; they continued to pursue self-expression with determination. Women artists did not suddenly emerge in the postwar period—they were always there.

**The Abakans by Magdalena ABAKANOWICZ: tactility of matter and sense of touch**  
**Marta SMOLINSKA**

Magdalena ABAKANOWICZ (1930-2017), a Polish artist whose work has recently been exhibited with great success at the Tate Modern in London, among others, wrote her own herstory in a specific way. She did not want to be perceived as a feminist and strongly emphasised that she was a 'sculptor', using the male form of the word. Following new materialism, I will, however, link the Abakans by Magdalena ABAKANOWICZ with feminism, which as we know would be against her will, even if such linkages have been repeatedly and convincingly made, especially abroad, by critics and curators. The key category characterising new materialism as a contemporary heterogeneous philosophical current for me will be matter perceived as the primary building block of reality, marked by agency and activity, and not merely a passive anticipation of an external idea originating outside matter. Matter treated in this way somehow automatically abolishes the domination of the sense of sight and the regime of scopos, and so the next path I will follow, discussing the Abakans, will be embodied, somaesthetic perception and hapticity in the expanded field, understood

as the interaction of all the senses within the functioning of the so-called haptic system, which every haptic empathetic subject possesses. I therefore interpret the Abakans as works that particularly intensely activate the ability to perceive and experience belonging to the sentient and thinking subject, involving equally the senses, the emotions and the mind. I treat the phenomenon of hapticity in the expended field not only as a modality of sight, but also as a modality of hearing, taste, smell, balance, and kinesthesia (proprioception), the latter two being added to the traditional list of the five senses. Analysing the Abakans, I do not, however, defend corporeality detached from thinking and consciousness. I somaesthetically embed this consciousness in the body, moving in the orbit of not only the so-called "material turn" but also "a turn towards experience". This is why it is crucial for me to distinguish between the terms "haptic" and "tactile", which I understand as follows: I define visual experiences, within which touch is a modality of vision, as haptic; tactile experiences, on the other hand, I understand as actual tactile fulfilment occurring through contact with a work of art. The Abakans fall into (or, according to the artist's original intention, fell into) both of these categories, because its author assumed real tactile contact of the recipients with the haptic matter of her works. In my argument, I will try to show that emphasising materiality and the sense of touch fits in perfectly with feminist discourses, even though Magdalena Abakanowicz herself did not want to be perceived through their prism.

## **Beyond the Dots: KUSAMA Yayoi's Presence, Absence, and Silent Appropriation in Art History**

**Paweł PACHCIAREK**

This presentation revisits the trajectory of KUSAMA Yayoi through the lens of shifting art-historical paradigms and postcolonial methodologies. Once rendered marginal—both geographically and epistemologically—KUSAMA's case exemplifies how women artists from outside the Western mainstream were repeatedly silenced or symbolically appropriated. Drawing on geoaesthetic and feminist discourses, this talk engages with the broader turn in art history towards polycentric modernities and the critique of a singular, Western-centered canon.

After arriving in the U.S. in 1957, KUSAMA developed a radical, interdisciplinary practice including her *Infinity Nets*, soft sculptures (*Accumulations*), and public performances.

Despite the originality of her vision, she remained largely excluded from critical discourse during her most productive years, even as elements of her work were absorbed—silently and often uncredited—by male contemporaries such as Warhol and Oldenburg. Frustrated by the patriarchal nature of the art world, she turned to performative and political actions in the streets of New York before returning to Japan in the 1970s. Her reemergence in the late 1990s and 2000s coincided not only with global institutional shifts but also with a market-driven interest in “iconic” figures.

Rather than celebrate KUSAMA's “comeback” as a corrective success story, this presentation interrogates the conditions under which her legacy was (re)constructed. How do we situate her visibility within the dialectic of global art history's ongoing decolonization and its simultaneous recourse to spectacle, celebrity, and commodification?

KUSAMA is a crucial figure for understanding both the failures and potentials of global art history. Her trajectory forces us to ask: are we merely expanding the canon to accommodate difference, or are we fundamentally rethinking how visibility, value, and voice are distributed? In this sense, KUSAMA's presence is not only emblematic—it is diagnostic. Her story challenges us to imagine art history beyond tokenism: as a discipline accountable to complexity, relationality, and silent genealogies long overlooked.

## **The Position and Significance of Maria STANGRET-KANTOR**

**KASUYA Akiko**

Maria STANGRET-KANTOR (1929–2020) was the partner of Tadeusz KANTOR and an indispensable figure in the fields of theater and performance. However, she was not merely a supporter of KANTOR but also a significant artist who pursued her own independent artistic explorations. Engaged in multiple disciplines—including painting, theater, and performance—she developed an expressive style that, while influenced by KANTOR, possessed a distinct and independent vision of its own.

From the 1950s onward, Maria participated in KANTOR's avant-garde theater activities, playing a symbolic role, particularly in *Cricot 2* in Kraków. She was but one of the key figures who embodied Kantor's directorial philosophy, making her an essential presence in his experimental stage productions. In major works such as *The Dead Class*, she made unique contributions to the spatial and narrative structure of the performances, profoundly shaping

Kantor's artistic output. She was also involved in stage design and direction, playing a crucial role in shaping the visual language of his works. For KANTOR she was more than a collaborator—she was his artistic “accomplice.”

However, Maria's artistic practice should not be understood solely in relation to KANTOR. Her own creative work was characterized by a poetic and intuitive approach. Particularly in painting, she developed a more introspective and personal vision, distinct from KANTOR's theatrical expressions. Her works reflect her unique artistic explorations through dreamlike imagery and restrained color palettes. Additionally, she engaged in poetry, experimenting with the intersection of words and visual imagery.

Maria STANGRET-KANTOR's artistic achievements and unique perspective have not been sufficiently recognized. Reassessing her work also leads to a broader reconsideration of the role of female artists within Polish avant-garde art. This presentation aims to shed new light on her as an independent artist, moving beyond her relationship with KANTOR, and to explore the significance of her creative output and contributions to Polish avant-garde art.

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### **Felice [Lizzi] RIX-UENO's Fantasy and Respect for Diverse Individuals**

**MAKITA Hisami**

In the 1950s and 1960s, a time when new postwar designs were emerging and expectations for design education were growing, pioneering design instruction was introduced in Kyoto by Felice [Lizzi] RIX-UENO, a former member of the Wiener Werkstätte (Vienna Workshops), and her husband, architect UENO Isaburo, who had made a name for himself in modern design in Vienna.

Felice RIX was born in Vienna in 1893 and entered the Vienna School of Arts and Crafts in 1912. There, she studied under Franz CIZEK and Josef HOFFMANN, both of whom were influential figures in introducing progressive methods into art education. Upon her graduation in 1917, she joined the Wiener Werkstätte, led by HOFFMANN. Her textile and pattern designs, known internationally as “RIX Patterns,” gained widespread recognition, including an award at the 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. That same year, she married UENO Isaburo, who had been studying in Vienna. After moving to Japan in 1926, she maintained ties with the Vienna Workshops and continued her career as an international designer, active in both Vienna and Kyoto.

In 1951, after the war, she became a lecturer in the Department of Crafts at Kyoto City University of Arts (then Kyoto Municipal College of Fine Arts). Her husband, UENO Isaburo, was also appointed as a professor in the same department. Together, they emphasized the importance of originality and encouraged students to cultivate their own “fantasies” through design.

They also actively supported students' international exchange and advocated for eliminating gender-based restrictions on university admissions and employment. Their flexible, global, and gender-inclusive approach to education was well suited to the rapidly changing postwar design landscape and contributed to the development of new industries by fostering innovative talent.

Despite their significant impact on Japan's postwar design scene, there has been little comprehensive research into the pedagogical philosophy and achievements of Felice and Isaburo. This presentation aims to shed light on their unique contributions and values—particularly their respect for individuality and diversity—as a foundation for further scholarly inquiry.

## **Margaret of Parma's Art Patronage as Regent of the Netherlands**

**FUKAYA Michiko**

This presentation explores the artistic policies of Margaret of Parma (1522–1586), the illegitimate daughter of Charles V (Carlos I), who served as Governor of the Netherlands (present-day Belgium) under her half-brother, King Philip II of Spain. In the 16th century, through the dynastic union of the Habsburgs and the Burgundian Dukes, the Netherlands came under Spanish rule. Owing to its geographic distance from Spain, the governorship was typically entrusted to members of the royal family. Early governors included Charles V's aunt Margaret of Austria (1507–1530) and his sister Maria of Hungary (1530–1555). Margaret of Parma followed this tradition, governing the region as Duchess of Parma despite being born outside of wedlock.

Although the governors were subordinate to the Spanish king, they wielded authority akin to that of a monarch. The Netherlandish court under their rule became a vibrant center for the arts, attracting renowned artists and housing prestigious collections. Both Margaret of Austria and Maria of Hungary are well known for their patronage and cultural influence, with much scholarly attention devoted to their collecting activities and the transmission of Netherlandish art to Spain. Similarly, the artistic policies of Isabella Clara Eugenia, daughter

of Philip II, and her husband Albert—who later jointly ruled the Netherlands—have become an increasingly important focus of recent research.

In contrast, Margaret of Parma's tenure, which represented a transitional phase from Burgundian-rooted governance to Spanish-appointed rule with no local dynastic ties, has received comparatively little attention. This neglect is largely due to the political instability that marked her time in office.

In the fall of 2024, a major exhibition dedicated to Margaret of Parma will be held for the first time, bringing renewed attention to her contributions. This presentation will provide an overview of the current state of research on Margaret, reconstruct her artistic patronage insofar as sources allow, and examine the cultural impact of her movements between Italy and the Netherlands. It will also introduce female artists indirectly connected to her and reflect on the broader roles of women as patrons and creators in the tumultuous artistic landscape of 16th-century Europe.

### **His/Her Story : from the novel *Orlando* (1928) to the film *Orlando* (1992)**

**NAKAMURA Midori**

Adaptation involves retelling an existing story in a different medium or context, as well as the resulting work itself. While various approaches exist within literary studies, adaptation studies have developed distinct theoretical frameworks since the early 21st century. This interdisciplinary field intersects with postcolonial, feminist, and queer studies—discourses that gained prominence in the late 20th century—offering new perspectives on canonical texts and broadening interpretive possibilities.

Virginia Woolf (1882–1941), a pioneering woman writer, challenged the social and economic positions of women nearly a century ago. In her 1928 novel *Orlando*, issues of gender and feminism are not only embedded in the narrative but also serve as driving forces of the plot, prompting readers to reconsider prevailing norms. While Woolf's insights were radical for her time, they also exhibit certain limitations when viewed through a contemporary lens.

Sally Potter's 1992 film adaptation of *Orlando*, directed by a woman, reinterprets Woolf's original ideas through the lens of modern values and utilizes the unique expressive capacities of cinema to reimagine the story. This presentation focuses on two key transformations in the adaptation: the portrayal of romantic relationships and the reconfiguration of inheritance. By

comparing these elements with those found in adaptations of works by other authors, including Shakespeare and Mérimée, the paper traces the evolution of thematic concerns through the process of adaptation. Ultimately, this analysis offers a space to reflect on the shifting roles and representations of women in the 21st century.

## **A Woman Drawing Women: My Story at Kyoto City University of the Arts**

**AKAMATSU Tamame**

In this presentation, I, AKAMATSU Tamame, will trace the evolution of my artistic career and reflect on how women—and more broadly, human beings—engage with and live in the world. Having studied at Kyoto City University of the Arts, later becoming a faculty member, and spending 38 years of my life in close connection with the university until my retirement, I offer a personal and historical perspective shaped by these experiences.

I entered Kyoto City University of the Arts in 1978 and completed a Master's degree in Painting at the Graduate School of Fine Arts in March 1984. After that, I began my full-fledged career as a painter. Following a period of creative work in Italy, I was appointed as a faculty member in the Department of Painting at my alma mater in April 1993. I was the ninth full-time female faculty member in the university's history since its founding in 1880. In 2019, I became the first female president of the university. In 2023, in conjunction with the relocation of the campus, I spearheaded the development of "Terrace," a new initiative to cultivate future artists, musicians, and researchers through collaboration with local communities, cultural institutions, businesses, and organizations, with art at its core. I completed my term as president in March 2025 and retired upon reaching the mandatory retirement age.

During the 1980s and 1990s, a time when Japanese society was beginning to move toward greater gender equality—marked by developments such as the enactment of the Equal Employment Opportunity Act—I launched my career as a painter. My early work aimed to express the social constraints faced by women in a male-dominated society, often wrapping these themes in humor and fantasy. My artistic practice in Italy enabled me to connect with women across national and cultural boundaries, fostering a sense of empathy and solidarity that informed the *ICONOVogue* series in the 2000s.

After experiencing childbirth and parenting, I began to depict scenes drawn from my personal life and the people around me. As my life stages evolved, so too did the depth of my expression, as I continued to portray human figures and images of women. In the ongoing *Ambiguity Stories* series, I use a variety of media to express the inner emotions,



contradictions, and the tangled intersection of love and hate that define the human experience.

In addition to my solo practice, I was also active as part of a trio of female artists in the 1980s, and in the 2010s, I participated in art-based exchange and support initiatives involving people with disabilities, their families, and care workers.

## **Magdalena ABAKANOWICZ Tapestry Studio in Poznań – A Space of Freedom and Revolution**

**Anna BOROWIEC**

The text "*The Magdalena ABAKANOWICZ Tapestry Studio in Poznań – A Space of Freedom and Revolution*" presents the *herstory* of female educators at the Poznań art school, which was established in 1919 as the State School of Decorative Arts and Artistic Industry. Inspired by the postulate formulated in *A Room of One's Own* by Virginia WOOLF, advocating for the recognition of female artists who have remained in the shadow of grand history, this study will focus not only on Magdalena ABAKANOWICZ and her revolutionary contribution to the curriculum of textile art but also on the women who were part of the teaching staff at the Poznań art school even before World War II. Many of these women held only instructor positions, occupying the lowest ranks in the school's hierarchy. It is worth recalling their presence in the *herstory* of the institution, particularly in the context of the pedagogical activities of the creator of the *Abakans*, as most of them were employed in the Textile Department of the Poznań School of Decorative Arts.

Magdalena ABAKANOWICZ was one of the few female artists who debuted during the Polish People's Republic (PRL) era and achieved artistic success as early as the mid-1960s. At the same time, she also joined the small and elite group of female professors, accepting an offer in 1965 to establish her own studio at the State Higher School of Fine Arts in Poznań. This text will explore her unique approach to teaching textile art, which she revolutionized by developing an innovative curriculum that encouraged experimentation with materials and fostered a creative dialogue with students.