

A painting of a woman in a red kimono with a floral pattern, holding a large, colorful fan. She is surrounded by several other fans of various designs and colors, some resting on the floor. The background is a textured, greyish-brown color.

# JAPONISME

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Until the 19th century, Japan remained fairly isolated from the Western world, and thus closed to its influences and vice versa. However, with British colonization in the 19th century, Japanese territory began to open up to external influences and the old Japanese social system was reformed.

In 1867, an internal revolution installed Emperor Mitsu-Hito on the throne, who proclaimed a new era - the Meiji era - determined to open up the country to external influences and changed the name of the capital from Edo to Tokyo.



*Promulgation of the Meiji Constitution (1889) by Toyohara Chikanobu.*








This is a brilliant civilization that begins to share its refined craftsmanship with the West, but also absorbs much of it. Japan quickly absorbs the techniques of Western industry, which it uses to build bridges (we see stone taking the place of wood) and takes the powerful and militarized Prussia as its greatest example.




These changes can be seen in some prints, which even show Western brands, such as Singer sewing machines. Between 1860 and 1870, there was a huge influx of art objects from Japan, creating a natural fascination about Japanese art and culture. A phenomenon called Japonisme was created by the exchange of influences between Japanese and European art; japonnerie was the expression used to name objects characterized by exaggerated enthusiasm (they were often superficial or even useless bric-a-brac).

The technique of creating prints came from China, where they were produced for religious purposes. In Japan, they were mainly created for decorative purposes, depicting everyday or popular scenes, and were sold cheaply - which is why they are widely sold in the West, creating many collectors.

## The main characteristics of Japanese woodcuts are:

-  Subjects are represented with an outline (due to the engraving on the wooden matrix);
-  Lack of shadow, depth and representation of the third dimension - the motif is only represented through layers of color;
-  Shades are soft and refined (such as pink or olive green), obtained from natural dyes;
-  Generally small size;
-  Drawing and calligraphy are associated, with some prints having a poem usually referring to the theme.

## The prints produced in this period can be divided into three themes:

-  The so-called “pretty girls” (relevant authors: Harunobu and Outamaro);
-  Theater (relevant authors: Shuraku and Kunisada);
-  Landscape (relevant authors: Hokusai and Hiroshige).



Two girls (c. 1750), by Suzuki Harunobu.



Japanese art manifests itself in Western art above all through the simplification of colors and perspective.

However, it could not be said that this was a copy of the Japanese artistic process, but rather a meeting of both cultures and artistic expressions.



*La Japonaise, Madame Monet en costume japonais, Claude Monet (Boston Museum of Fine Arts, USA).*

Japonism also greatly influenced Western artists very early on:

Manet - Portrait of Émile Zola (1868);

Tissot - La Japonaise au Bain (1864);

Monet - La Japonaise, Madame Monet en costume japonais (1876).



Vincent Van Gogh was influenced by various sources, including his passion for the stylized representations of Japanese woodcuts (Ukiyo-e).



*The Courtesan (1887), Vincent Van Gogh (painting based on a Japanese print; Van Gogh Museum, Holland).*



In “Portrait of Père Tanguy”, from 1887, Van Gogh depicts his paint supplier, Julien Tanguy, with Japanese woodcuts in the background. In fact, Van Gogh painted two versions of this portrait, both of which show Ukiyo-e by Japanese artists such as Hiroshige and Kunisada.



*Portrait of Père Tanguy (1887), Vincent Van Gogh (Rodin Museum, France).*



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