Global Exhibition Histories and Their Visual Time. Shikō Munakata in Warsaw

Gabriela Świtek

In 1961, the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions in Warsaw presented an exhibition of woodcuts by Shikō Munakata (1903–1975). The show coincided with the time when the artist – known for his inspirations from Japanese folk art and Buddhism – gained international recognition. In 1955 he received the award at the 3rd São Paulo Biennale, and in 1956 he was the first Japanese artist to receive the Grand Premi at the 28th Venice Biennale. My aim is not to outline the history of Polish-Japanese cultural diplomacy (these contacts included, e.g., Polish artists' participation in the International Biennale Exhibition of Prints in Tokyo). The intention is to pose questions about visual time and global art geopolitics in exhibition histories (following arguments by, e.g., Keith Moxey). What are the prospects for global exhibition histories when the exhibition is a visual constellation of artworks – each creating its own visual time? Could official international exhibitions in the Eastern Bloc contribute to understanding global art and its histories? To what extent have official international exhibitions contributed to challenging cultural stereotypes while subjected to censorship and other political entanglements?

Keywords
exhibition histories – art geography – global art history – Japanese woodcuts – Shikō Munakata

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In 1961, a Warsaw newspaper reported: "Colorful woodcuts are blooming in the little Japanese garden at Zachęta."[1] The woodcuts were by Shikō Munakata (1903–1975), known for his inspirations from Japanese folk art and Zen Buddhism, who had been the first Japanese artist to receive the Grand Prize for printmaking at the 28th Venice Biennale (1956). Munakata's exhibition was held at the Zachęta Gallery, the then seat of the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions (Centralne Biuro Wystaw Artystycznych), the state institution founded in 1949 and responsible for art exchange in the Polish People's Republic and abroad. The "little Japanese garden" alludes to the exhibition design by a Polish architect, Stanisław Zamecznik (1909–1971).[2] Some of Munakata's woodcuts were placed on screens set in fields filled with gravel. Zamecznik also decorated the gallery halls with tree limbs, placed on the floor and suspended in space, which – to a Polish art critic – appeared both "Japanese and Art Nouveau."[3]

Organized by the Japanese Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries and the Polish Committee for UNESCO, Munakata's exhibition in Warsaw was part of the post-war renewal of diplomatic relations between Poland and Japan. A treaty to restore relations between the Polish People's Republic and Japan was signed

1 (grt), "W japońskim ogródku w 'Zachęcie' kwitną barwne drzeworyty. Shiko Munakata," *Express Wieczorny*, 1961, issue 84, p. 2. Japanese personal names are given following the sequence in Polish reviews and catalogs (name, surname).

2 For the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Zamecznik designed, e.g., Henry Moore's show (1959). See Helena KĘSZYCKA – Tamara BRYJOWA – Maria MATUSIŃSKA – Barbara MITSCHEIN (eds.), *Rocznik CBWA 1959–1960–1961,* Warszawa: Centralne Biuro Wystaw Artystycznych [1962], pp. 22, 53. He also created a Warsaw presentation of *The Family of Man*, a traveling exhibition of American photography (1959). See Kamila DWORNICZAK, *Rodzina człowiecza. Recepcja wystawy* The Family of Man *w Polsce a humanistyczny paradygmat fotografii*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego 2021, pp. 133–134, 138–140.

3 Andrzej OSĘKA, "Cienie demonów," *Przegląd Kulturalny,* 1961, issue 16, p. 8. For the uniqueness of Zamecznik's design of Munakata's exhibition, see Gabriela ŚWITEK, "Przedmowa," in: Małgorzata BOGDAŃSKA-KRZYŻANEK – Joanna EGIT-PUŻYŃSKA – Maria ŚWIERŻEWSKA, *Grafika polska w CBWA 1956–1971*, Warszawa: Zachęta – Narodowa Galeria Sztuki – Fundacja Kultura Miejsca 2021, pp. 18–20.

in 1957.[4] The Embassy of Japan returned to Warsaw the same year. The outlined chronology – including the dates significant to the history of cultural diplomacy – enables us to situate Munakata's exhibition in specific political and historical contexts. These contexts, however, constitute only a surface of complex cultural phenomena – the exhibition's visual time resulting from the varied tempos and rhythms of the reception of Munakata's art in distant geographical locations. What initially drew my attention in the Polish reception of Munakata's exhibition was an East-European attempt at assimilating and understanding modern Japanese art when Polish-Japanese cultural relations were being rebuilt after World War II.

"What are the prospects for a world or a global art history under conditions that recognize the incommensurability of different national and cultural traditions?"[5] Keith Moxey poses the above question in his book *Visual Time: The Image in History* and addresses an argument that "historical time is not universal but heterochronic, that time does not move at the same speed in different places."[6] In a sense, the acts of researching and understanding visual phenomena as heterochronic invalidate the concepts of "cultural backwardness" or "belatedness." These notions are related to the linear time of colonial modernity, often discussed and questioned in the contemporary histories of Central and Eastern European art.[7] Following some of Moxey's arguments, I suggest substituting the concept of "image" with the notion of "exhibition." Shikō

4 Arkadiusz TARNOWSKI, "Polska–Japonia (1957–1991). Stosunki polityczne i gospodarcze," in: Ewa PAŁASZ-RUTKOWSKA, *Polska i Japonia. W 50. rocznicę wznowienia stosunków oficjalnych*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego 2009, pp. 69–70.

5 Keith MOXEY, *Visual Time: The Image in History*, Durham NC: Duke University Press 2013, p. 1.

6 *Ibid*.

7 See, for example, Maja and Reuben FOWKES, "How to Write a Global History of Central and Eastern European Art," in: Agata JAKUBOWSKA – Magdalena RADOMSKA (eds.), *Horizontal Art History and Beyond: Revising Peripheral Critical Practices*, NewYork – London: Routledge 2023, p. 112.

Munakata's exhibition in Warsaw serves as a case study where I discuss aspects of the global geography of art exhibitions. My concern is the visual time of Munakata's exhibition, which triggers reflection on the methodological prospects of art history.

These prospects are inscribed in "global exhibition histories." This expression, which I include in the essay's title, requires clarification especially in light of contemporary debates on world and global art histories.[8] In this type of research, the subjects are exhibitions, not individual artworks. At the same time, images understood as reproductions in the press or art history textbooks affect exhibitions' reception. The visual time of an exhibition is not only the date of its presentation in a gallery but also its textual and visual reception, the study of which – especially in the case of international traveling shows – encourages art historians to transcend their national and regional perspectives. Munakata's exhibition in Warsaw may provide an interesting case study because it was the first individual exhibition of a contemporary Japanese artist organized after World War II in a Polish institution dominated by displays from the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. It should also be emphasized that in the second half of the 1950s, Munakata's works were presented on five continents, at cyclical exhibitions (biennials), and individual shows. This circulation was undoubtedly facilitated because they were prints that could be reproduced in many copies and easily transported.[9] Therefore, "global" refers to the globalized

8 See, e.g., Wilfried VAN DAMME – Kitty ZIJLMANS, "Art History in a Global Frame: World Art Studies," in: Matthew RAMPLEY – Thierry LENAIN – Hubert LOCHER – Andrea PINOTTI – Charlotte SCHOELL-GLASS – Kitty ZIJLMANS, *Art History and Visual Studies in Europe: Transnational Discourses and National Frameworks*, Leiden – Boston: Brill 2012, pp. 217–230.

9 I discuss this aspect of prints exhibitions, organized in large numbers by the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, in Gabriela ŚWITEK, "The Borderlines of the Thaw: Graphic Art from the Federal Republic of Germany in Warsaw's 'Exhibition Factory' (1956–1957)," *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki,* 2020, No. 1, pp. 147–149. For the logistic aspects of print exhibitions, see Jennifer NOONAN, "Prints and Printmaking at the Venice Biennale, 1930s–1970s," *OBOE Journal*, Vol. 3, 2022, No. 1, p. 3.

art world, structures, and institutions responsible for exhibition circulation. Still, the research subject is not only global circulation but also the modalities of local reception.

Munakata's global circulation: Tokyo, São Paulo, Venice, New York, and Warsaw

In many aspects of the exhibition's visual time, the Warsaw show was not "belated." Organized four years after the opening of the Japanese embassy in Warsaw, this official exhibition fell within the time when Shikō Munakata had just gained international recognition. Awarded in 1970 the Order of Culture by the Japanese government, Munakata is considered today one of the most renowned Japanese woodblock artists. He was born in Aomori (northern Japan) as the third son of a blacksmith. In 1921, after seeing a Van Gogh sunflower painting on a magazine cover, he aspired to become a painter but received no formal art education. In 1924 he moved to Tokyo, but only in 1928 were his works accepted for the first time to the Imperial Fine Arts Exhibition. In the 1930s, his works were shown at the exhibitions of the National Painting Association (*Kokugakai*). Already at the end of the 1920s, Munakata focused on woodblock printing. In the 1930s, he became acquainted with Yanagi Muneyoshi (Sōetsu, 1889–1961) and other leaders of the Japanese folk art movement (*Mingei*), who became his mentors. From 1939–1941, his series of woodcuts, including *Ten Great Disciples of Buddha Sakyamuni*, was shown at his individual show and the Kokugakai exhibitions.[10]

Before his success at the 28th Venice Biennale in 1956, Munakata had received the top award for prints at the 3rd

10 See *Chronicles*, https://munakatashiko-museum.jp/en/chronicles/ (accessed March 5, 2023).

São Paulo Biennale (1955).[11] In 1958, he took part in an exhibition of contemporary Japanese art financed by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo. This group show opened in Rome in April 1958 and traveled to Germany, France, Yugoslavia, Egypt, and Iran.[12] In January 1959, the Japan Society invited Munakata to the United States; in June, in New York, he opened a gallery devoted exclusively to his art. In 1959, Munakata also traveled to Europe. The *Chronicle* of the Munakata Shikō Memorial Museum of Art, founded in Aomori in 1975, enumerates his visits to the museums in the Netherlands, France (including Van Gogh's grave in Auvers-sur-Oise), Spain, Italy, and Switzerland. In January 1960, the Cleveland Museum of Art presented 96 works by Munakata. The Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service circulated this show to Chicago, Seattle, Los Angeles, and San Francisco.[13] In April 1961, shortly after Munakata's American and European *grand tours*, his works arrived in Warsaw.

The Munakata Shikō Memorial Museum of Art does not record the exhibition in Warsaw in the artist's curriculum.[14] For the Polish audience, however, Munakata's exhibition was one of the first opportunities after World War II to get acquainted with contemporary Japanese art; the exhibition of Japanese woodcuts from the 17th to the 20th century, presented in 1960 at the National

11 *Shiko Munakata* (exh. catalog), Warszawa: Centralne Biuro Wystaw Artystycznych 1961, unnumbered [9].

12 See *Chronicles*, https://munakatashiko-museum.jp/en/chronicles/ (accessed March 5, 2023).

13 *Ibid*. See also *Shiko Munakata* (exh. catalog), Cleveland: Print Club of Cleveland and the Cleveland Museum of Art 1960, p. 18.

14 See *Chronicles*, https://munakatashiko-museum.jp/en/chronicles/ (accessed March 5, 2023).

Museums in Warsaw and Cracow, had a similar effect.[15] Mikołaj Melanowicz, a translator of Japanese literature, saw Munakata's exhibition in 1961 as a fresh graduate of Japanese studies in Poland. He recalls it as a "great event" when Poland's ties with Japan were "still tenuous." In the early 1960s, he had only heard of performances by the Polish professional folk and dance group Mazowsze (Mazovia) in Japan as part of the Polish-Japanese cultural exchange.[16] Moreover, Munakata's exhibition was the first show of contemporary Japanese art at the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions.

In the 1950s, the Central Bureau hosted shows from three Asiatic communist states, North Korea (1954), China (1955), and Vietnam (1959), but not from Japan, which, after the U.S. occupation (ended in 1952), followed the international path of "mercantile realism" and profited from the growth of world trade.[17] The exhibitions from Asian countries did not always feature works of art; an example is *The Democratic People's Republic of Korea in Photography* (1954). The exhibition was organized on the "9th anniversary of the liberation by the Soviet Army" (15 August 1945, the day of Japan's emperor's announcing the country's surrender, is still celebrated as the National Liberation Day in both North and South Korea), gathered several hundred photographs depicting the reconstruction of the country: mines, steel mills, shipyards, as well as rice crops and cotton fields. The exhibition's narrative naturally reflected the political geography. It presented, for example,

15 The 1960 exhibition of Japanese woodcuts in the National Museum in Warsaw is mentioned, e.g., in a review of Munakata's show. Elżbieta SZTEKKER, "Drzeworyty Shiko Munakata," *Tygodnik Demokratyczny*, 1961, issue 17, p. 8. See also: Zofia ALBEROWA – Maria DZIEDUSZYCKA (eds.), *Drzeworyt japoński XVII–XX w.* (exh. catalog), Warszawa: Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie 1960.

16 Mikołaj MELANOWICZ, "Munakata Shiko w Warszawie i w Aomori," in: Mikołaj MELANOWICZ, *Japońskie fascynacje. Eseje pisane na marginesie*, Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek 2020, p. 273.

17 Kenneth B. PYLE, *Japan Rising: The Resurgence of Japanese Power and Purpose*, New York: Public Affairs 2007, p. 212.

"destruction caused by the barbaric action of American aggression" and the aid of the Soviet nations, the Chinese, and other people's democracies. The "friendship of Korean and Chinese peoples" was mainly celebrated. One photograph reproduced in the catalog presents: "Chinese construction specialists working on constructing a central hospital in Pyongyang." [18]

A similar political ambiance dominated *The Chinese Woodcut Exhibition* (1955). It included works created since 1950, depicting "the struggle of the Chinese people to defend world peace and the construction of socialism in China."[19] The largest of the abovementioned events was *The Art of Vietnam* (1959), which presented traditional, folk, and contemporary art (socialist realism).[20] In addition, the Central Bureau used to show works by Polish artists traveling to Asia as part of the official cultural policies of the Eastern Bloc, for instance, drawings from China by Tadeusz Kulisiewicz (1953–1954), drawings from China and Vietnam by Aleksander Kobzdej (1954), drawings from China by Andrzej Strumiłło (1955), and *Chinese Landscape in Painting and Drawing* by Leon Michalski (1960).[21] What kinds of exhibitions were expected at the Central Bureau, and to what extent they reflected the political geography of the Cold War, is evidenced by a handwritten note from a Polish audience survey preserved in Munakata's exhibition documentation: "I don't understand how Japanese graphic

18 *Wystawa fotograficzna Koreańska Republika Ludowo-Demokratyczna* (ex. catalog), Warszawa: Centralne Biuro Wystaw Artystycznych 1954, p. 19.

19 *Wystawa drzeworytu chińskiego* (exh. catalog), Warszawa: Centralne Biuro Wystaw Artystycznych – Wydawnictwo "Sztuka" 1955, unnumbered [4].

20 For a chronology, see Gabriela ŚWITEK (ed.), *Zachęta 1860–2000*, Warszawa: Zachęta Narodowa Galeria Sztuki 2003, pp. 330–331.

21 For Polish artists' journeys to China, see Joanna WASILEWSKA, "Trzej polscy artyści w Chinach w latach 50. XX wieku," *Techne. Seria Nowa*, 2019, issue 3, pp. 139–152. See also Andrzej SZCZERSKI, "Global Socialist Realism: The Representation of Non-European Cultures in Polish Art of the 1950s," in: Jérôme BAZIN – Pascal DUBOURG GLATIGNY – Piotr PIOTROWSKI (eds.), *Art beyond Borders: Artistic Exchange in Communist Europe (1945–1989)*, Budapest: Central European University Press 2016, pp. 439–452.

art could find its way into the Zachęta. After all, they do not belong to the Warsaw Pact."[22] Unlike Poland and other socialist countries, Japan belonged to the "First World." The perception of Japan in Poland around 1960 must have been affected by years of post-war political rhetoric. In the catalog of the above-mentioned Korean exhibition of 1954, Japan is described as the occupier of the Korean Peninsula (1910–1945), the "gendarme of the East."[23]

After World War II, contemporary Japanese artists were known in Poland mainly for their successes at the International Poster Biennale, the first edition of which took place at the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions in 1966. On this occasion, Kazumasa Nagai and Hiroshi Tanaka won two main prizes, for the advertising poster and the social poster.[24] Munakata's exhibition appeared in Warsaw a few years earlier; until then, Japanese art was known in Poland mainly thanks to the collection of Feliks "Manggha" Jasieński (1861–1929). His collection included Polish art of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, European prints, and art from Southeast Asia (India, Siam, Cambodia, Korea, Indonesia) and Central Asia (Mongolia, Tibet). However, its core was Japanese art, including 4,600 *ukiyo-e* woodcuts (for instance, Katsushika Hokusai, Utagawa Hiroshige, Kitagawa Utamaro, and Utagawa Kuniyoshi). Born into the Polish landed gentry, Jasieński began his collection with the family fortune. He purchased Japanese artworks during his trips to Paris, from bouquinistes and antique dealers, at auctions in other

22 See the folder *1961 Shiko Munakata*, Documentation Department, Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw.

23 Andrzej BRAUN, *Na 9 rocznicę wyzwolenia Korei*, in: *Wystawa fotograficzna Koreańska Republika Ludowo-Demokratyczna* (exh. catalog), Warszawa: Centralne Biuro Wystaw Artystycznych 1954, p. 5.

24 For Japanese participants, see: Maria MATUSIŃSKA – Barbara MITSCHEIN (eds.), *I Międzynarodowe Biennale Plakatu Warszawa 1966 / Ie Biennale Internationale de l'Affiche Varsovie 1966* (exh. catalog), Warszawa: Centralne Biuro Wystaw Artystycznych 1966, pp. 97–110.

French cities, London, Amsterdam, Leiden, and Vienna.[25] In 1901, he organized the first exhibition of Japanese art from his collection in the building of the Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts in Warsaw (after World War II, this building was the gallery of the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, which in 1961 presented Munakata's exhibition). In 1920, Jasieński, who had never visited Japan, donated this collection (including c. 5,000 Japanese woodcuts, lacquer, bronze, textiles, and *katagami*) to the National Museum in Cracow.[26]

Munakata's exhibition in Warsaw included 23 series of woodcuts and nine separate works from 1935–1958. Only eight pieces were reproduced in the small catalog from the series *Kingdom of Flowers* (1935), *The Gate of Demons* (1937), *Kegon Sutra* (1937), *Hannya Shingyo* (1941), *Ten Great Disciples of Buddha Sakyamuni* (1939–1948) and two fragments of *Hunting in Flowering Wilderness* (1954) on the cover. The latter work was exhibited, for instance, at São Paulo (1955), Venice (1956), at the solo shows in the Cleveland Museum of Art (1960), and Musée Guimet in Paris (1960).[27] The Paris exhibition included the same set of works as the Warsaw venue.[28] It seems that it was the same show circulating in Europe; as a Polish critic reported: "In 1959, an exhibition of Munakata's works opened in

25 Bronisława GUMIŃSKA, "Feliks Manggha Jasieński. 'Wszyscy marzymy, by dosięgnąć księżyca…,'" *Rozprawy Muzeum Narodowego w Krakowie*, 2010, No. 3, pp. 17–64.

26 Agnieszka KLUCZEWSKA-WÓJCIK, "Collecting and Promotion of the Japanese Art in Poland at the Turn of the 19th and 20th Century," in: Agnieszka KLUCZEWSKA-WÓJCIK – Jerzy MALINOWSKI (eds.), *Art of Japan, Japanisms and Polish-Japanese Art Relations*, Toruń: Polish Institute of World Studies – Tako Publishing House 2012, p. 167. See also Ewa PAŁASZ-RUTKOWSKA – Andrzej T. ROMER, *Historia stosunków polsko-japońskich* 1904–1945 (Volume I), Warszawa: Uniwersytet Warszawski – Wydział Orientalistyczny – Katedra Japonistyki 2019, p. 33.

27 See, e.g., *Shiko Munakata* (Cleveland), p. 26.

28 The exhibition at the Musée Guimet was shown between 4 November and 5 December 1960 and at the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions between 7–21 April 1961. The Zachęta's Documentation Department holds a French catalog and two photographs of Munakata's exhibition at the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague (1961), representing, e.g., a display of the series *Ten Great Disciples* and a print of the series *Kingdom of Flowers* (the same work is reproduced in the Warsaw catalog). See a folder: *1961 Shiko Munakata*, Documentation Department, Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw.

Tokyo, which is currently on display at Warsaw's Zachęta during its tour of European capitals."[29]

The Warsaw catalog reproduced only two works of the celebrated series *Ten Great Disciples of Buddha Sakyamuni*: *Subhūti, Master of the Immaterial*, and *Pūrnamaitrāyanīpurta, Master of Teaching*.[30] The series was first displayed in 1939 at Munakata's solo exhibition in Japan.[31] In the 1950s, the *Ten Great Disciples of Buddha Sakyamuni* series was shown in Lugano (1952), São Paulo and Venice. Today, an edition of the series is part, for example, of the New York Metropolitan Museum collection of Asian art.[32] In the 1960 catalog published by the Cleveland Museum of Art, the then director of the institution, Sherman E. Lee, notes that the *Ten Great Disciples* and other Buddhist series "have immediate aesthetic impact in their bold black and white patterns although the subject matter is unknown to most non-Japanese."[33]

Lee's remarks on Munakata's celebrated series and its iconography, unfamiliar to "most non-Japanese," and Moxey's comments on the incommensurability of different traditions have triggered my ruminations on the global geography of art exhibitions. In the late 1950s and at the beginning of the 1960s, just before the Warsaw show, Munakata's prints were circulating through the medium of exhibition on five continents – in Asia, Europe (on both sides of the Iron Curtain), Africa (Egypt), South and North Americas. But in what way could the global dissemination

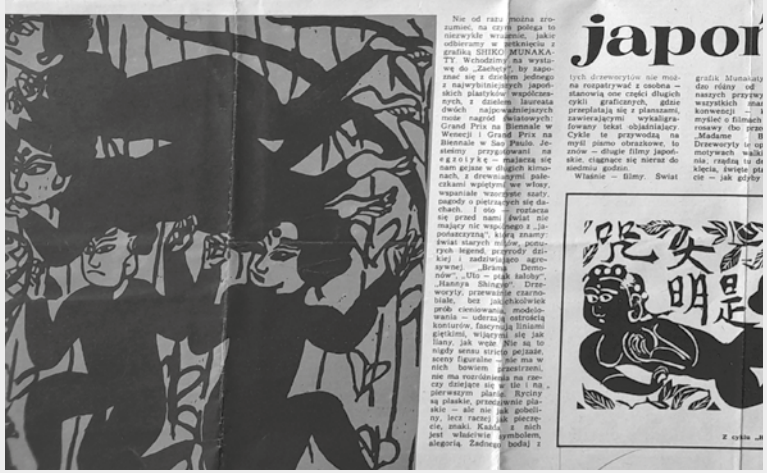
29 Ewa GARZTECKA, "Królestwo kwiatów i Brama demonów (O wystawie grafiki Shiko Munakata w Zachęcie)," *Trybuna Ludu*, 1961, issue 102, p. 6.

30 The Warsaw catalog does not contain full titles of the works. For the series, see *Munakata and the Disciples of Buddha* (exh. catalog), New York: Ronin Gallery 2017, p. 33, 39. See: https://issuu.com/roningallerynyc/docs/web-_3-6_munakatabook (accessed March 5, 2023).

31 *Chronicles*, https://munakatashiko-museum.jp/en/chronicles/ (accessed March 5, 2023).

32 The series was purchased in 2017 from the Ronin Gallery in New York; https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/751907?sortBy=Relevance&ft=Munakata+Shik%c5%8d&offset=0&rpp=40&pos=6 (accessed March 5, 2023).

33 Sherman E. LEE, "Introduction," in: *Shiko Munakata* (Cleveland), p. 13.



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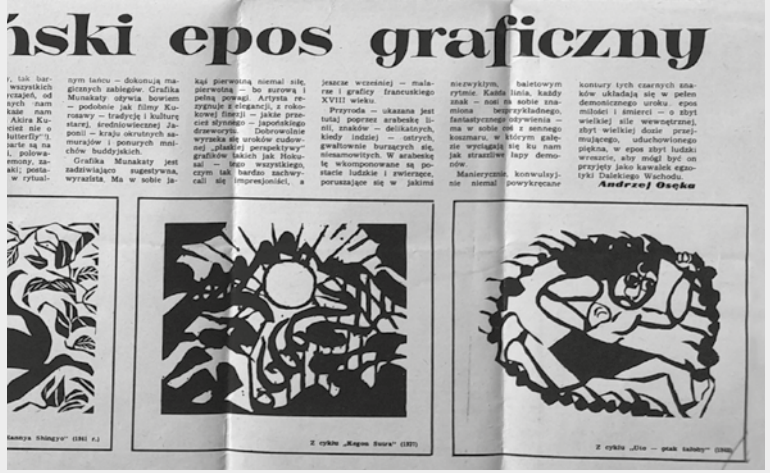
Nie od razu można zrozumieć, na czym polega to niezwykłe wrażenie, jakie odbieramy w setkniętu z grafiką SHIKO MUNAKATY. Wchodzimy na wystawę do „Zachęty", by zapoznać się z dziełem jednego z najwybitniejszych japońskich plastyków współczesnych, z dziełem laureata dwóch najprestiżowniejszych mote nagród światowych: Grand Prix na Biennale w Wenecji i Grand Prix na Biennale w Sao Paulo. Jesteśmy przygotowani na egzotykę — mającą się nam gejsze w długich kimonach, z drewnianymi pałeczkami wpiętymi we włosy, wspaniałe wzorzyste szaty, pagody o pietrzących się dachach. I oto — rozłacza się przed nami świat nie mający nic wspólnego z „japońszczyzną", którą znamy: świat starych mitów, ponurych legend, przygody dzikiej i zadziwiająco agresywnej. „Bramą Demonów", „Ulo — ptak żałoby", „Hantya Shingyo". Drzeworyty, przeważnie czarno-białe, bez jakichkolwiek prób cieniowania, modelowania — uderzają ostrością konturów, fascynują liniami giętkimi, wijącymi się jak liany, jak węże. Nie są to nigdy sensu stricto pejzaże, sceny figuralne — nie ma w nich bowiem przestrzeni, nie ma rozróżnienia na rzeczy dziejące się w tle i na pierwszym planie. Ryciny są płaskie, przeczarowanie płaskie — ale nie jak gobeliny, lecz raczej jak pieczęcie, znaki. Każdy z nich jest właściwie symbolem, alegorią. Zadnego bodaj z tych drzeworytów nie można rozpatrywać z osobna — stanowią one części długich cykli graficznych, gdzie przeplatają się z planszami, zawierającymi wykaligrafowany tekst objaśniający. Cykle te przywodzą na myśl pismo obrazkowe, to znów — długie filmy japońskie, ciągnące się nieraz do siedmiu godzin.

Właśnie — filmy. Świat grafik Munakaty dzu rojny od naszych przyrzy wszystkich ma konwencji — myśleć o filmach rosawy (bo prze „Madame B Drzeworyty te op motywach walki nia; rządzą tu d klęcia, święte gó cie — jak gdyby

Z cyklu „



ński epos graficzny

nym tańcu — dokonują magicznych zabiegów. Grafika Munakaty ożywia bowiem — podobnie jak filmy Kurosawy — tradycję i kulturę starej, średniowiecznej Japonii — kraju okrutnych samurajów i ponurych mnichów buddyjskich.

Grafika Munakaty jest zadziwiająco sugestywna, wyrazista. Ma w sobie jakąś pierwotną niemal siłę, pierwotną — bo surową i pełną powagi. Artysta rezygnuje z elegancji, z rokokowej finezji — jakie przecież słynnego — japońskiego drzeworytu. Dobrowolnie wyrzeka się uroków cudownej „płaskiej perspektywy" grafików takich jak Hokusai — bez wszystkiego, czym tak bardzo zachwycali się impresjoniści, a jeszcze wcześniej — malarze i graficy francuskiego XVIII wieku.

Przyroda — ukazana jest tutaj poprzez arabeskę linii, znaków — delikatnych, kiedy indziej — ostrych, gwałtownie burzących się, niesamowitych. W arabeskę tę wkomponowane są postacie ludzkie i zwierzęce, poruszające się w jakimś niezwykłym, baletowym rytmie. Każda linia, każdy znak — nosi na sobie znamiona bezprzykładnego, fantastycznego ożywienia — ma w sobie coś z sennego koszmaru, w którym galerie wyciągają się ku nam jak straszliwe łapy demonów.

Manieryczne, konwulsyjnie niemal powykręcane konturv tych czarnych znaków układają się w pełen demonicznego uroku. epos miłości i śmierci — o zbyt wielkiej sile wewnętrznej, zbyt wielkiej dozie przejmującego, uduchowionego piękna, w epos zbyt ludzki wreszcie, aby mógł być on przyjęty jako kawałek egzotyki Dalekiego Wachodu.

Andrzej Osęka

Z cyklu „Kagon Sutra" (1971)

Z cyklu „Ulo — ptak żałoby" (1968)

↩
Shikō Munakata, Warsaw: Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions 1961 – Andrzej Osęka, "Japoński epos graficzny," *Zwierciadło*, 1961, No. 18, pp. 8–9.

of Munakata's prints contribute to the formation of global art history?

In Polish reviews, one rarely finds deepened interpretations of Munakata's works, including the celebrated series *Ten Great Disciples of Buddha Sakyamuni*. Most critics appreciated the originality of the exhibition design, which – in their opinion – "facilitates the reception" and "emphasizes a specific mood" of Japanese culture.[34] Still, some textual sources may be puzzling in what concerns a then Polish understanding of Japanese traditional art and culture. As was noted in a 1961 Polish review of Munakata's exhibition, quoted at the beginning of my essay: "It is a little Japanese garden known from a flower shop's windows, enlarged to the size of two exhibition halls."[35] This remark seems to confuse one of the types of Japanese gardens (namely a "Zen garden" composed of rocks, stones, and gravel, the term used in Japanese publications on gardening no earlier than in the 1950s)[36] with the art of *bonsai*. A European version of a Japanese garden (but not a dry landscape garden) might have been known from a direct experience of a garden in Wrocław, part of the *Garden Art Exhibition* (1913).[37] The art of *bonsai*, miniature trees grown in pots, owe their popularity in Europe thanks to the 1937 International Exposition in Paris.[38] It is difficult to determine whether a reviewer of Munakata's exhibition saw a *bonsai* in a Polish flower shop as early as 1961; the collection of National Digital Archives includes

34 Ignacy WITZ, "Grafika Shiko Munakata," *Życie Warszawy*, 1961, issue 93, p. 8.
35 (grt), "W japońskim ogródku w 'Zachęcie' kwitną barwne drzeworyty," p. 2.
36 See Agnieszka KOZYRA, "Zen Influence on Japanese Dry Landscape Gardens," in: KLUCZEWSKA-WÓJCIK – MALINOWSKI, *Art of Japan, Japanisms*, p. 51.
37 See Małgorzata WOŁODŹKO, "The Japanese Garden in Wroclaw – Trends in Transformations from 1913 to 2005," in: KLUCZEWSKA-WÓJCIK – MALINOWSKI, *Art of Japan, Japanisms*, pp. 61–68.
38 Tomasz SZUBIAKIEWICZ, "Skarby kultury Japonii i historia japońsko-polskiej fascynacji," in: Tomasz SZUBIAKIEWICZ, *Japonia – Polska coraz bliżej siebie. Wystawa ze zbiorów Biblioteki Narodowej, Muzeum Narodowego i Ambasady Japonii w Warszawie pod honorowym patronatem Andrzeja Wajdy*, Warszawa: Biblioteka Narodowa 2002, p. 36.

a photograph of a *bonsai* tree from a flower shop at Nowy Świat Street in the center of Warsaw, taken in 1988.[39]

In light of advanced post-colonial studies, the remark about the "little Japanese garden" may sound today like a European example of "orientalizing the Orient." It should be noted, however, that in the 1960s Poland, Japanese culture was rarely known from direct experience. Shortly after the re-establishment of diplomatic relations in 1957, it was mainly diplomatic corps, Japanese scholars, geographers, musicians, writers, and journalists who traveled to Japan.[40] At the same time, Japanese academic studies began to develop in Poland. The first post-war lecturer of Japanese, a native speaker, began teaching at the University of Warsaw in 1959.[41] The same year, Kōji Kamoji (b. 1935), a Japanese artist who lives in Poland and has been cooperating with the Foksal Gallery since the late 1960s, came to study at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts as a scholarship holder of the Polish Ministry of Culture and Art.[42] Kamoji's arrival in Poland was not accidental; he is related to Ryōchū Umeda, the first lecturer of Japanese at the University of Warsaw in the 1920s, and the tutor of many Polish orientalists and Japanese scholars. Kamoji's first exhibition at the Foksal Gallery (1967) resembled a small Japanese dry landscape garden. The artist "covered a section of the floor with a layer of white pebbles and placed his paintings on it."[43]

39 See the record: "Drzewka 'bonsai' w kwiaciarni przy ul. Nowy Świat w Warszawie, photo: Janusz Mazur," Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe, no. 3/4/0-/438505.
40 SZUBIAKIEWICZ, "Skarby kultury Japonii," p. 54.
41 Ewa PAŁASZ-RUTKOWSKA, *Historia stosunków polsko-japońskich* 1945–2019 (Volume II), Warszawa: Uniwersytet Warszawski – Wydział Orientalistyczny – Katedra Japonistyki 2019, p. 376.
42 *Ibid*., pp. 572–573.
43 Wiesław BOROWSKI, "The Hole and the Garden," in: Maria BREWIŃSKA (ed.), *Koji Kamoji. Cisza i wola życia / Silence and the Will to Live* (exh. catalog), Warszawa – Kraków: Zachęta Narodowa Galeria Sztuki – Muzeum Sztuki i Techniki Japońskiej Manggha 2018, p. 156.

The question of reception

The global circulation of exhibitions does not always – or not right away – contribute to a deeper understanding of national art presented almost simultaneously in distant geographical locations, as may be concluded from the preliminary remarks on Munakata's reception in Warsaw. Researching exhibition histories includes a comparison of how a traveling show is received in different places. Let us, therefore, compare the reception of Munakata's works in Poland and the United States between 1960 and 1961. Were the historical horizons of this almost simultaneous reception radically different in two distant locations? Or rather, what made them different, given that Munakata's exhibitions included nearly the same sets of artworks? We may assume that the reception of Japanese art in Poland and the United States differed for political and economic reasons, as was the dynamics and scope of international art exchange in both countries after World War II.[44]

As aforementioned, in January 1960, the Cleveland Museum of Art presented Munakata's exhibition, which, in a way, summarized his American art residency. In April 1961, some Polish critics admitted they did not "know Japanese art well enough to comment on Munakata."[45] But where could they get their knowledge of contemporary Japanese art? An outline of Japanese art by Wiesław Kotański, the founder of Japanese studies in Poland, was published only in 1974 (in 1961, Kotański edited an anthology of Japanese literature). This book devotes only the last several pages to modern Japanese art. It mentions, however, Munakata's art and reproduces two works from the series *The Great Disciples of Buddha*, presented at the

44 For the exhibitions of Japanese arts and crafts in the United States see Takuya KIDA, "Japanese Crafts and Cultural Exchange with the USA in the 1950s: Soft Power and John D. Rockefeller III during the Cold War," *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 25, 2012, No. 4, pp. 379–399.
45 WITZ, "Grafika Shiko Munakata," p. 8.

Warsaw exhibition.[46] Writing for Polish readers, Kotański also included the winners of the 1966 International Poster Biennale; the book reproduces posters for which Japanese artists received awards in Warsaw: Hiroshi Tanaka's social poster popularizing the blood donation campaign (1965) and Kazumasa Nagai's poster advertising Asahi beer (1966).[47] The second important monograph on the history of Japanese art, published in Poland only in 1983, was a book by Zofia Alberowa, an art historian, who, from 1968, was the curator of the Department of Far Eastern Art at the National Museum in Cracow. Modern and contemporary art (from 1868, the beginning of the Meiji period) is described on seven (!) pages, but with a separate commentary on Munakata's prints as well as a reproduction of his work of 1954:

> Engraved with a thick, as if careless line, strong in expression and at the same time decorative, often illustrating Buddhist themes – his woodcuts sometimes resemble primitive, one-color prints of the early Japanese Middle Ages, sometimes folk graphics. They combine tradition with modernity in a surprisingly unconventional way.[48]

Let us add that the only book published in Poland on the history and culture of Japan (before the Warsaw exhibition of Munakata) that Alberowa mentions is by a Czech orientalist, Vlasta Hilská (1957).[49]

46 Wiesław KOTAŃSKI, *Sztuka Japonii*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe 1974, pp. 302–303.
47 *Ibid*., pp. 306–307.
48 Zofia ALBEROWA, *O sztuce Japonii*, Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna 1983, pp. 175–176.
49 Vlasta HILSKÁ, *Dzieje i kultura narodu japońskiego. Krótki zarys*, Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe 1957 (in Czech: *Dějiny a kultura japonského lidu*, Praha: Nakladatelství ČSAV 1953). See a bibliography in: ALBEROWA, *O sztuce Japonii*, p. 180.

In 1961, the primary source of knowledge about Munakata's works was a small catalog of the Warsaw exhibition. It includes nine reproductions, a list of exhibited works, Munakata's biography, and a one-page essay by Yanagi Muneyoshi (Sōetsu). In Polish reviews, however, we find no remarks on Muneyoshi's activities as a renowned founder of the Japanese folk crafts movement (*Mingei*) in the 1920s, whose texts were published in English by the Japanese Society for International Cultural Relations in the late 1940s and the 1950s.[50] In the Warsaw catalog, Muneyoshi presents Munakata almost as a naïve/folk artist, who creates instinctively and spontaneously:

> Munakata lives as children do. [...] He prefers to be guided by his instincts rather than by artistic rules. He hardly ever makes preparatory sketches for his woodcuts; he sculpts directly in the wood. [...] In the European view, Japanese woodcuts are always associated with the art of Ukiyo-e. But Munakata's woodcuts do not resemble Ukiyo-e. He appropriates the Buddhist woodcut tradition that developed in the 9th century and between the 15th and 16th centuries.[51]

The Japanese philosopher and art critic mentions two traditions of Japanese woodblock prints, *ukiyo-e*, and the old Buddhist. Still, he does not further explain the specificity of the latter as a source for Munakata's prints. Polish critics

50 See, for instance, Yanagi SŌETSU, *Folk-Crafts in Japan*, Tokyo: Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai (The Society for International Cultural Relations) 1958 (previous editions: 1949, 1956).
51 Yanagi MUNEYOSHI, "Sztuka Shiko Munakata," in: *Shiko Munakata* (exh. catalog) Warszawa: Zachęta 1961, unnumbered [5]. For Muneyoshi, see, e.g., Brian D. MOERAN, "Yanagi Muneyoshi and the Japanese Folk Craft Movement," *Asian Folklore Studies*, Vol. 40, 1981, No. 1, pp. 87–99.

seemed more competent in discussing the Western contexts of Munakata's art rather than his complex Japanese heritage. However, following Muneyoshi's argument, they noted the difference between his woodcuts and the *ukiyo-e*. Andrzej Osęka writes, for example: "the artist renounces the elegance, Rococo finesse of […] Japanese woodcuts. […] He renounces the charms of the wonderful 'flat perspective' of graphic artists such as Hokusai."[52] In another review, the same critic recalls "good Father Tanguy, as van Gogh painted him with Japanese woodblock prints" and Feliks "Manggha" Jasieński's collection. Still, he associates Munakata's woodcuts with Akira Kurosawa's films; *Throne of Blood*, for instance, was distributed in Poland in 1960.[53] This context of the reception of Japanese art in post-war Poland is recalled in the monograph by Alberowa. As she noted in 1983:

> The extensive collection of Feliks Jasieński donated to the National Museum in Cracow is still not displayed due to the lack of appropriate exhibition rooms. In recent years, when interest in the Land of the Rising Sun is deepening in Poland again (thanks to the influx of Japanese films of great artistic value and exhibitions of graphic arts and posters), knowledge of art remains at the stage of *Madame Butterfly*.[54]

In Polish reviews, apart from the opinions repeated after Muneyoshi's essay, we find comments betraying a specificity of Central-Eastern European art geography: "It is no coincidence that Japanese and Chinese painters are so fashionable in Paris now. It is no coincidence that there is so much talk

52 Andrzej OSĘKA, "Japoński epos graficzny," *Zwierciadło*, 1961, issue 18, p. 9.
53 Andrzej OSĘKA, "Cienie demonów," *Przegląd Kulturalny*, 1961, issue 16, p. 8.
54 ALBEROWA, *O sztuce Japonii*, p. 5.

in Paris about the philosophy of Zen, about the beauty of calligraphy."[55] In this view, Paris – not New York, who "stole the idea of modern art" (as Serge Guilbaut famously argued)[56] – is still considered a center where one can observe Zen philosophy's most significant post-war impact. In the late 1950s, Polish artists traveled to Paris (if at all) rather than New York.[57] Munakata's work is also discussed in the context of the "second wave" of Japanese influence on European art. This wave was manifested both in Paris and at the Venice Biennale where the Japanese pavilion – the first Asian national pavilion in the history of the festival – became the center of attention in three subsequent editions (1956, 1958, 1960). The reason for this interest, as explained in the Polish press, was that West European and North American contemporary art was "in crisis." Young Japanese art is characterized by a spontaneous "modernity" that can bring life to Western art's routine.[58] In this Paris-Venice modern art geography, Polish critics perceived Munakata's prints in 1961.

While Polish critics discussed Munakata's works recalling the European Japanisms and Japanese abstract art presented at the post-war Venice Biennale, the audience situated them in the context of international exhibitions traveling to Poland. "Shiko Munakata is too modern for me; I like him more when he draws directly from Japanese or Indian patterns, while Mexican-Picasso phantasies appeal to me less."[59] This opinion, shared in the 1961 audience survey at the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions,

55 OSĘKA, "Cienie demonów," p. 8.
56 Serge GUILBAUT, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom and the Cold War*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1983.
57 See Piotr MAJEWSKI, *La Vague polonaise. Migracje artystów i wędrówki dzieł sztuki nad Sekwanę w czasach żelaznej kurtyny (lata 1955–1969)*, Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS 2020.
58 Joanna GUZE, "Munakata," *Świat*, 1961, issue 17, p. 18. For the Japanese pavilion, see https://venezia-biennale-japan.jpf.go.jp/e/art/1956 (accessed March 5, 2023).
59 See the folder *1961 Shiko Munakata*, Documentation Department, Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw.

alludes to the exhibitions of Mexican art circulating in the socialist states of Eastern Europe in the 1950s. In 1955, *The Exhibition of Mexican Art: Contemporary Painting and Graphic Art from the 16th to 20th Century*, including the works of the famous Mexican Taller de Gráfica Popular (People's Graphic Workshop), was shown in Warsaw. While Picasso's presence behind the Iron Curtain has been carefully researched,[60] little is known about Japanese artists exhibiting in Poland in the 1950s. Still, one example is worth mentioning; in 1955, at the International Young Art Exhibition, held at the Central Bureau as part of the 5th World Festival of Youth and Students in Warsaw, the special Prize for Peace went to *Atom Bomb*, a painting by a Japanese woman artist Saori Akutagawa (1924–1966).[61] The Polish press frequently reproduced this work of art. Unfortunately, nothing more, except for commenting on the iconography alluding to the 10th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, was written about post-war Japanese art.

Given the political circumstances of the early 1960s Polish–Japanese cultural relations, it is no surprise that neither the Warsaw catalog nor Polish reviews offered an art historical interpretation of Munakata's works from a post-war Japanese perspective. At the same time, in the Cleveland catalog (1960), the artist is considered "molded by East and West, old and new, 'folk' and 'intelligentsia.'"[62] His art is discussed in the context of both the Buddhist tradition and post-war Japanese openness to international modern art movements:

60 See Piotr BERNATOWICZ, *Picasso za żelazną kurtyną. Recepcja artysty i jego sztuki w krajach Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej w latach 1945–1970*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Universitas 2006.

61 *Exposition internationale de l'art des jeunes* (exh. catalog), Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sztuka 1955, p. 14.

62 LEE, "Introduction," p. 13.

> The Japanese, with a tradition of ready assimilation much misunderstood by Western critics, were already familiar with pre-war French and German art, and eagerly made a rapid and enthusiastic effort to bring themselves abreast of the recognized artistic leaders of the West.[63]

Moreover, while in 1961 Polish critics had no access to art historical monographs on post-war Japanese art, the Cleveland catalog offers a list of the most recent publications on Munakata available in English. These include Oliver Statler's *Modern Japanese Prints: An Art Reborn* (1956), Yojurō Yasuda's and Statler's *Shikō Munakata* (1958), and Yanagi Muneyoshi's *Shikō Munakata: Wood-Block Prints* (1958).[64]

In contemporary research, Munakata is introduced as a member of two Japanese movements, the *Sosaku Hanga* (creative print) and *Mingei* (folk art); his complex Japanese and Eastern heritage is explained in more detail than in the catalog of the Warsaw exhibition. It includes, for example, the 12th century *inbutsu* ("stamped Buddha"), Buddhist prints understood as a devotional practice; Munakata often commented on his devotion to Zen Buddhism values.[65] The *ukiyo-e*, another type of the woodblock print, practiced by artists known in the West, such as Utamaro and Hiroshige, was not the tradition Munakata was following, as Muneyoshi emphasized in the Polish catalog.

Munakata's Western connections are equally manifold. As a young artist, he was a reader of a Japanese literary and

63 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

64 Oliver STATLER, *Modern Japanese Prints: An Art Reborn*, Rutland – Vermont – Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company 1956 (chapter on Munakata, pp. 79–84); Yojurō YASUDA (ed.), *Shikō Munakata* (English text by Oliver STATLER), Rutland – Vermont – Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company 1958; Yanagi MUNEYOSHI (Sōetsu), *Shikō Munakata: Wood-Block Prints*, Tokyo: Chikuma-Shobo 1958.

65 See *Munakata and the Disciples of Buddha* (exh. catalog), New York: Ronin Gallery 2017, p. 7.

art magazine *Shirakaba* (White Birch), which reproduced the works of Cézanne, Matisse, Gauguin, and van Gogh.[66] As Sherman E. Lee argued in 1960, Munakata's visual interpretations of Buddhist Japanese and European sources are "not unlike that of the German Expressionist printmakers, who made telling studies of late medieval German wood-block prints and Romanesque sculpture."[67] Indeed, there is an "expressionist" value in Munakata's works, e.g., from the series *The Kingdom of Flowers* (1935) and *Kegon Sutra* (1937) reproduced in the Warsaw catalog. It is also a telling, art historical parallel that Munakata's woodcuts were appreciated in São Paulo in 1955, the year of the first documenta in Kassel when the German Expressionists were reintroduced to the art world for the first time since the *Degenerate Art* show in Munich in 1937.

In his essay "Munakata in New York: A Memory of the '50s," Arthur Danto recalls the artist's process of carving woodblocks, as documented in a film presenting three contemporary Japanese masters:

> The film showed him at work, a slightly wiry, intense man [...] with wild hair and huge glasses, bending over a woodblock so close one felt he was *feeling* it with his eyes, cutting away with an incredible sureness and speed. [...] the whole process consisting of just three rapid movements, tirelessly repeated, like the steps of a dance.[68]

Danto's recollections offer yet another view of Munakata's woodcuts. The artist's creative process is juxtaposed with the second wave of Japanese influence upon modern Western art. This wave came through Zen, which

66 *Ibid.*, p. 19.
67 LEE, "Introduction," p. 12.
68 Arthur DANTO, "Munakata in New York: A Memory of the '50s," *The Print Collector's Newsletter*, Vol. 10, 1980, No. 6 (January–February), p. 185.

"celebrated a sort of disciplined spontaneity." Danto argues: "These notions almost exactly coincided with a parallel obsession with creative action, [...] which was embodied [...], in the great painterly swags of de Kooning, the fluid intricate skeins of Pollock, or the para-calligraphic architectures of Franz Kline."[69] Not only German Expressionism but also American Abstract Expressionism turns out to be crucial for understanding Munakata's reception in the 1950s United States. In the 21st-century Western art historical interpretations, however, not Munakata but the Gutai group and its "creative misreading of Pollock" seems to be the leading representative of the second wave of the Japanese impact on Western art.[70] In 1958, a year before Munakata's arrival in the United States, the Gutai exhibition was held at the Martha Jackson Gallery in New York. The show was curated by Michel Tapié, the theorist of *taschisme* (considered a European version of Abstract Expressionism).[71]

For American art historians and critics, the common ground for action painting and Munakata's creative process (working "quickly, expressively and with his entire body")[72] is to be found in Zen Buddhism, as taught by Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki. Danto recalls that in the 1950s New York, "delegates from the downtown art world made weekly pilgrimages to Dr. Suzuki's seminars on Zen, held in Philosophy Hall at Columbia University."[73] Polish reviewers of Munakata's exhibition in 1961 acknowledged the importance of Zen for the Parisian post-war art milieu.[74] On this occasion, however, no comparison was made

69 *Ibid.*, p. 184.
70 Hal FOSTER – Rosalind KRAUSS – Yve-Alain BOIS – Benjamin H. D. BUCHLOH, *Art since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*, London: Thames & Hudson 2007, p. 373.
71 *Ibid.*, p. 375.
72 Allen HOCKLEY, "The Zenning of Munakata Shikō," *Impressions*, 2004, issue 26, p. 78.
73 DANTO, "Munakata in New York: A Memory of the '50s," p. 185.
74 OSĘKA, "Cienie demonów," p. 8.

between Zen Buddhism and Abstract Expressionism; it is no surprise since Pollock's action painting was not exhibited in the 1960s Polish People's Republic.

Conclusion

I have enumerated Warsaw, Tokyo, Lugano, São Paulo, Venice, New York, Cleveland, Paris, and other cities to sketch the global circulation of Shikō Munakata's exhibitions in the 1950s and early 1960s. I have recalled *Mingei*, *inbutsu*, *ukiyo-e*, Art Nouveau, German Expressionism, Abstract Expressionism, and more notions situating Munakata's prints, presented in Warsaw in 1961, in the context of Eastern and Western art histories. Following Keith Moxey's dilemma about the prospects for a global art history "in circumstances that recognize the incommensurability of different national and cultural traditions,"[75] my aim has not been to outline the history of Polish-Japanese cultural diplomacy. The intention is to address some questions of visual time and global art geopolitics in exhibition histories. What are the prospects for global exhibition histories when the exhibition is a visual constellation of artworks – each creating its own visual time? In what ways can temporary exhibitions of the past be revisited today? Their "original" visual time seems always mediated through catalogs, press reproductions, photography, and films, other visual media.

The exhibition is a temporary constellation of works, the reception of which differs in various places, determined by political and aesthetic perspectives of national art histories and art criticisms. At the same time, each piece in this constellation has its history (including its place in the oeuvre and the biography of an artist, its inspirations, and the moments of its public displays). Therefore, I suggest using "histories" in the plural, which corresponds to Moxey's "heterochronicity" and the nature of the

75 MOXEY, *Visual Time: The Image in History*, p. 1.

exhibition, which is a heterochronic medium per se.

Global exhibition histories can be defined as research into cyclical international exhibitions, such as biennials, when works from many countries are gathered in one place.[76] In this essay, the adjective "global" is applied not only to international, cyclical group exhibitions but also to the problem of worldwide circulation of works by one artist, and the modalities of exhibitions' local reception. What does it mean that some exhibitions, artworks, and artists appeared at the "right time and place" as modern or "avant-gardist," while others were considered "belated"? In 1961, as the history of the reception of Munakata's exhibition in Warsaw demonstrates, art critics referred to the Japanese *ukiyo-e* tradition but were unfamiliar with the terms *Mingei* or *inbutsu*. They acknowledged some aspects of expression in the Japanese artist's woodcuts but did not associate them with German Expressionism and even less with American Abstract Expressionism. However, this lack of knowledge should not be interpreted as "belatedness" but analyzed against the background of the then political and (art) historical realities.[77]

Could official international exhibitions in the Eastern Bloc contribute to understanding global art and its histories? To what extent have official international exhibitions contributed to challenging cultural stereotypes while subjected to censorship and other political entanglements? Munakata's show in Warsaw serves as a starting point for sketching a microhistory, which is understood as a facet of

76 See, for example, Charles GREEN – Anthony GARDNER, *Biennials, Triennials, and documenta: The Exhibitions That Created Contemporary Art*, Chichester: Wiley Blackwell 2016.

77 On "belatedness," see discussion in: James ELKINS (ed.), *Is Art History Global?*, New York – Oxon: Routledge 2007, pp. 122–123.

global exhibition histories.[78] I argue that the history of one exhibition presented in the official circulation, not in the "center" but on the "periphery," not in the "first" but in the "second" political world of the time, can contribute to revealing global processes in the art world. This narrative contains not only elements of reception history and critical discourse analyses but also a history of art institutions (including exhibition chronologies and institutional policies), cultural diplomacy and art exchange, elements of the artist's biography (including their itineraries and art residencies), aspects of museology (at which exhibitions a given work was shown, for which museum collections it was purchased), and a history of art history (when and where handbooks, monographs, catalogs were published).

I started this essay with a somewhat stereotypical comment in the Polish press about the "little Japanese garden," but I end with a question: what do we want from art exhibitions? Do we expect them to be the genuine and long-lasting merging of distant traditions or sources of encyclopedic-like knowledge? If so, we might be disappointed. Or, we should ask, as if paraphrasing W. J. T. Mitchell: what do exhibitions want from art historians?[79] They come as temporary (and challenging to be reconstructed) visual situations but are endowed with the power to shift the horizons of perception, reception, and understanding of distant cultures.

78 In a similar way, I analyze, for example, the first exhibition of Cuban art (1962) at the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions. See Gabriela ŚWITEK, "'Like Fidel at a Rally in Havana': Warsaw's Exhibition of Cuban Painting with a Global Political Crisis in the Background (1962)," *Miejsce*, 2019, issue 5, http://miejsce.asp.waw.pl/en/jak-fidel-na-wiecu-w-hawanie/ (accessed August 8, 2023).

79 W. J. T. MITCHELL, *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 2005.