John Szostak

**Okada, Kenzô 岡田**謙**三 (1902–1982)**

Kenzô Okada was an American painter of Japanese birth, and one of the earliest artists from Asia to earn an international reputation as an Abstract Expressionist. Okada began his artistic training at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts, but withdrew in 1924 in order to travel to France. In Paris, he met fellow expatriate Fujita Tsuguharu, and became acquainted with Alberto Giacometti and Marie Laurencin. A comparison of Laurencin’s portraits with work from Okada’s initial phase suggests her example was important in the development of his early figural style. Okada returned to Japan in 1927 due to financial hardship, at which point he became associated with the Nikakai, where he exhibited for the next thirty years. In 1950, Okada moved from Japan to New York, where befriended Mark Rothko, Bradley Walker Tomlin, and Clyfford Still. The work of these New York School painters encouraged Okada to forgo representational styles in favour of abstraction. During this latter phase, he rendered his paintings in subdued, flat colours with a decorative lyricism often associated with traditional Japanese painting aesthetics, and indeed, he later came to define abstraction as “West and East meeting each other.” Okada became an American citizen in 1960 but made frequent visits to Tokyo, where he died in 1982.

**References and further reading**

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