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Shinnanga

Shinnanga (新南画), or “neo-nanga,” is a term that came into use during the Taisho period (1912-1926) to describe new interpretations of literati-style painting by Japanese artists at that time. Nanga (南画) is the Japanese adaptation of Chinese literati painting and is also known as nanshūga (南宗画) or “Southern style painting”, bunjinga (文人画) or literati painting (Ch. renwenhua). Shinnanga initially referred to experimentations among artists of nihonga (日本画, Japanese-style painting) and yōga (洋画, Western-style painting) with themes, pictorial techniques, and sensibilities associated with literati painting, iIncluding vertical landscape compositions, expressive brushwork, a reduced colour palette, and an impressionistic approach to representing form. The revival of nanga and emergence of shinnanga occurred within the context of a broader resurgence of Sinology fuelled partly by the disintegration of the Qing dynasty, Japan’s rise as an imperial power and the ensuing shifts of power in its relationships with China and the West. Japanese scholars found in nanga an artistic tradition that could hold its own against Western art history, arguing that nanga’s preference for subjectivity of over likeness inspired the movement of Western art’s movement towards expressionism and abstraction. Nanga was championed as the pre-eminent artistic expression of East Asia, and as an example of the common heritage of countries in the region, was invoked to naturalise Japan’s project of a Greater East Asia.

During the Meiji period (1868-1912) nanga, represented by artists such as Tomioka Tessai (富岡鉄斎, 1837-1924), Okuhara Seiko (奥原晴湖, 1837-1919) and Taki Katei (瀧和亭, 1830-1901), was popular with audiences and enjoyed the patronage of wealthy, educated Sinophiles. On the other hand, nanga had low value as an export product and was consequently of little interest to the government. Furthermore, art was now expected to express the cultural identity of the emerging nation and edify the populace. Being closely associated with China, a country that was no longer a cultural or political model for Japan, and concerned more with self-expression than grand narratives, nanga was deemed inadequate for this role. In 1882, a lecture given by Ernest Fenollosa (1853-1908), a leading figure in the formation of a modern concept of Japanese art, condemned nanga as a harmful foreign import with no artistic merit.

Nanga was the subject of a well-publicised revival between the 1910s and 1930s. For yōga artists such as Yorozu Tetsugorō (萬鉄五郎, 1885-1927), Morita Tsunetomo (森田恒友, 1881-1933), and Kosugi Hōan (小杉放庵, or Kosugi Misen 小杉未醒, 1881-1964), nanga offered an authentically Eastern response to Western Post-Impressionism and Expressionism. Among nihonga artists like Ogawa Usen (小川芋銭, 1868-1938), Hirafuku Hyakusui (平福百穂, 1877-1933), Imamura Shikō (今村紫紅, 1880-1916), Hayami Gyoshū (速水御舟, 1894-1935), Tomita Keisen(冨田溪仙, 1879-1936), Hashimoto Kansetsu (橋本関雪, 1883-1945) and Ogawa Senyo (小川千甕, 1882-1971), nanga, with its emphasis on spontaneity and subjectivity, offered an alternative to the heavily coloured, highly finished, contrived style that had come to dominate Japanese painting.

The term shinnanga was probably first publicly introduced in 1917, in a special issue of the art magazine Chūō Bijutsu (中央美術) devoted to the prevalence of nanga-style works emerging among these artists. The editorial, titled ‘Shinnanga no kiun ugoku’ (新南画の機運動く, ‘The Emergence of Shinnanga’), observed that a number of nihonga and yōga artists without traditional training in nanga were reviving the art form. The article argued this lack of training, which implied not only painting techniques but also calligraphy and Chinese poetry, allowed artists to engage more directly with their subject and freed them from clichés blamed for the decline of nanga among classically trained artists. Their works generally dispensed with the lengthy inscriptions of Chinese poetry traditionally considered to be integral to literati painting, and tended towards nativist rather than continental subject matter. Harmonious colours were preferred to the monochrome ink and rich use of pigments typically used by Meiji period nanga artists. Shinnanga was exhibited in the government sponsored salon, group and private exhibitions, and society exhibitions including those of the Sangokai (珊瑚会, Coral Society), founded in 1915 by Hyakusui and others, and Kokuga sōsaku kyōkai (国画創作協会, Society for the Creation of National Painting).

Classically trained nanga painters such as Komuro Suiun (小室翠雲, 1874-1945) and Matsubayashi Keigetsu( 松林桂月, 1876-1963) also contributed to the modernisation of nanga. Nanga societies established an important forum for like-minded artists from the 1890s. The most significant of these was the Nihon Nangain (日本南画院), which provided a national platform for artists of all stylistic backgrounds painting nanga between 1921 and 1936. Led by Komuro Suiun, the group included progressive artists such as Mizukoshi Shōnan (水越松南, 1888-1985), Yano Tetsuzan (矢野鉄山, 1894-1975), Yamaguchi Hachikushi (山口八九子, 1890-1933). Exhibition catalogues, representing works that experimentally adapted elements of literati painting, Western realism and expressionism, nativist yamatoe (大和絵), Kanō (狩野) school painting, as well as contemporary Chinese painting and nihonga, document the liberal ethos of the group. The word shinnanga was applied to their efforts, and while some critics praised the group’s progressive rationale, others complained that the paintings had veered too far from literati principles, while others again found the group to be still inhibited by convention.

References and further reading

Berry, Paul and Morioka, Michiyo. (2008) Literati Modern, Honolulu Academy of Arts, Seattle, distributed by University of Washington Press.

(essays provide an overview of the modernisation of nanga and many of the key artists involved in the movement based on a private collection)

Chiba Kei. (2003) ‘Nihon bijutsu shisō no teikokushugika—1910–20 nendai no nanga saihyōka o meguru ikkōs̄atsu’, Bigaku, vol. 54, no. 1, 56-68. (an analysis of imperialist though in discourse on nanga)

Hyōgo Kenritsu Bijutsukan [Hyōgo Prefectural Museum of Art]. (c.2008) Nanga tte nanda Nanga tte nanda - nihon no kokoro to bi [What is Nanga?]. (contains detailed essays on the emergence of shinnanga and the relationship between Western painting and Japanese painting, with a focus on artists Murakami Kagaku and Mizukoshi Shōnan)

Miyagi-ken Bijutsukan [Miyagi Prefectural Museum of Art]. (1993) Kindai no bunjinga [Modern literati painting], 1993 (exhibition catalog, reproduces excerpts of primary texts regarding shinnanga)

Aida Yuen Wong. (2006) Parting the mists: discovering Japan and the rise of national-style painting in modern China, Honolulu : Association for Asian Studies : University of Hawai'i Press. (examines the rise of East Asian studies and interest in nanga in Japan and China between the 1910s and the Pacific War)

Links (there are very few relevant artworks reproduced online)

Kosugi Hōan 小杉放庵

http://www.khmoan.jp/

Komuro Suiun 小室翠雲

http://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E5%B0%8F%E5%AE%A4%E7%BF%A0%E9%9B%B2

http://mmag.pref.gunma.jp/collection/honken/komuro\_syunu.htm

Tomita Keisen冨田溪仙 http://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/entity/%2Fm%2F0t5fhr9?projectId=art-project http://www.seattleartmuseum.org/emuseum/code/emuseum.asp?style=single&currentrecord=4&page=search&profile=objects&searchdesc=tomita%20keisen&quicksearch=tomita%20keisen&newprofile=objects&newvalues=1&newcurrentrecord=5

Hirai Baisen 楳仙

http://www.seattleartmuseum.org/emuseum/code/emuseum.asp?style=single&currentrecord=2&page=search&profile=objects&searchdesc=hirai%20baisen&quicksearch=hirai%20baisen&newprofile=objects&newvalues=1&newcurrentrecord=1

http://www.seattleartmuseum.org/emuseum/code/emuseum.asp?style=single&currentrecord=1&page=search&profile=objects&searchdesc=hirai%20baisen&quicksearch=hirai%20baisen&newprofile=objects&newvalues=1&newcurrentrecord=2