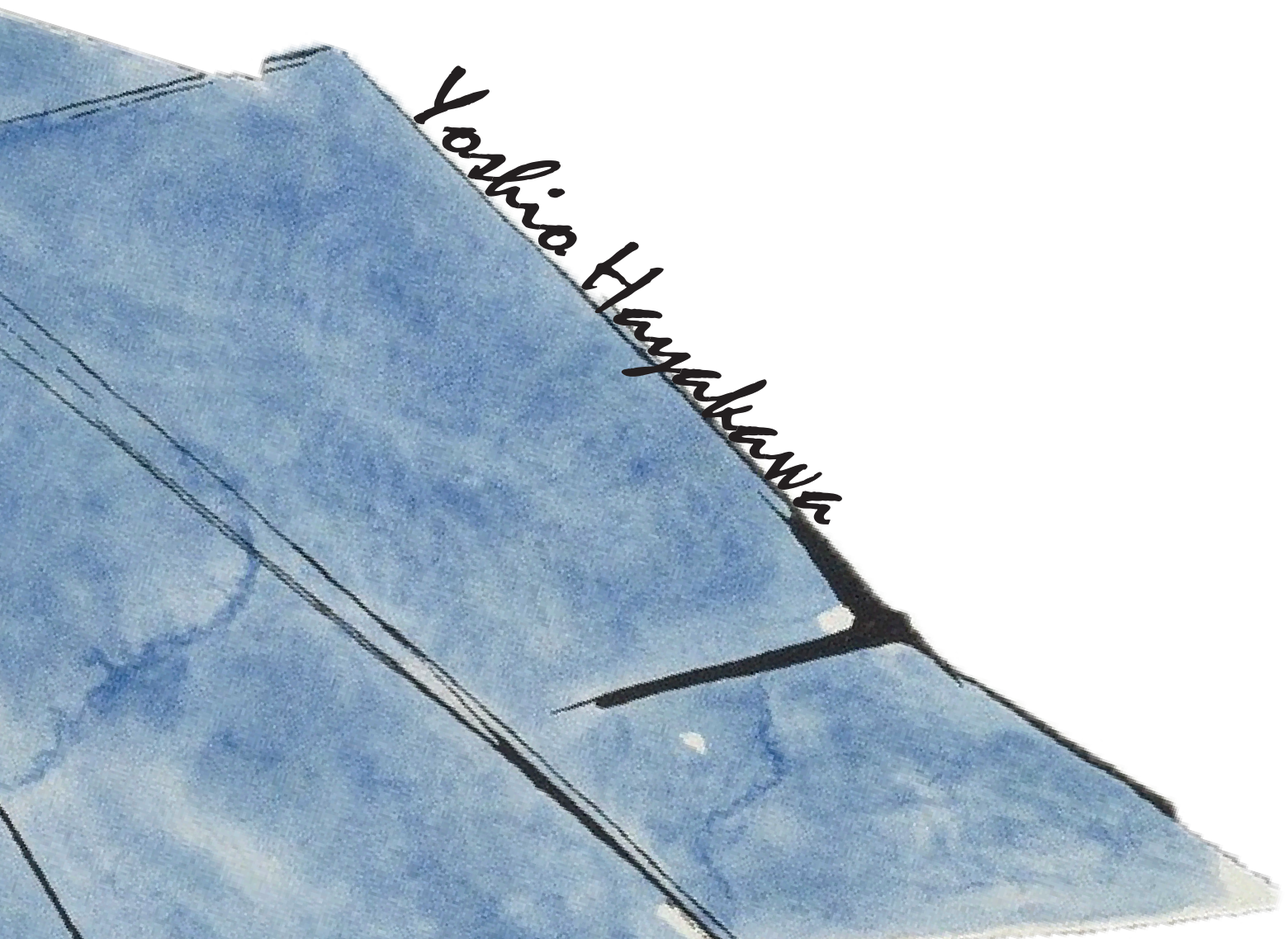


Yoshio Hayakawa, often said to embody the "traditional sprit" of Japanese graphic design[1], was a post-WII Japanese designer, illustrator, and commercial artist. He was born in 1917 in Osaka, Japan, and by the age of 19 he had already graduated from the Osaka Prefectural Industrial Arts School.[2] After graduation, Hayakawa went into advertising and lived in Osaka's cultural district. He worked as a window display artist, and later, an advertising designer, for various department stores such as Mitsukoshi and Kintetsu.[3] From 1943–1948, Hayakawa took a five year break from working to fulfill his military service.[4] He went on to open his own design firm in 1954 in Tokyo, lectured at the University of Arts in Kyoto, and had a full and influential career until his death in 2009.[5] Some of his contemporaries and collaborators include Yusaku Kamekura, Kenya Hara, and Hiroshi Ohchi.

At first glance, Hayakawa's work can look somewhat similar or repetitive, but he expressed his beliefs through the strong ideas backing each piece he created. A combination of consistency in style, progression in ideas, and accomplishments sums up the character of both his body of work, and his career.

Hayakawa earned a lot of recognition over the course of his life and career, from gaining many followers both stylistically and philosophically, such as Ikko Tanaka. He acted as a forefather to a lot of younger designers in many aspects, showing not only them, but Western designers as well, that being an accomplished, well revered designer and coming from an Eastern background did not have to be mutually exclusive. After his death, the National Museum of Art in Osaka, keeping in character with its longstanding relationship with Hayakawa since its opening in 1977, honored his legacy with a retrospective exhibition on his work.[6]

It is clear that one function of graphic design is to communicate messages. I believe, however, that it should not end up being just a technique and that it is important that we invite the world of graphic design, with its formative appeal consisting of color and shape, to inject elements of beauty into people's lives.[7]

–Yoshio Hayakawa

Western Influence and Reaction

Hayakawa worked at a point some consider to be the "dawn" of Japanese design because of the kind of artistic "renaissance" happened in the country post-WWII, as Western influence and a restructured Japanese society contributed to the field's exponential growth.[8] Many of Hayakawa's contemporaries were embracing Western influence. Advertisers, commercial artists, and designers were creating work with concepts clearly borrowed from Europe, some combining Japanese and Roman characters, others adjusting their color palettes to be less earthy and subdued, and some, on the more extreme end, created designs more similar to Swiss modernist design than any traditional Japanese style.[9]

However, Hayakawa reacted to the rising Western influence by not only embracing, but highlighting traditional Japanese styles in both his advertising and illustrative work. Much of his work uses thick brushstrokes and large solid lines, as well as features more minimalist human forms drawn in an exaggerated style. In fact, Hayakawa's human elements tend to be more conceptual and symbolic than strictly communicational or representative.

Top: "7th Kimono Show" by Yoshio Hayakawa for the Kintetsu Department Store, Lithograph c. 1952

Bottom: Advertisment for the 5th International Biennial Exhibition of Prints in Tokyo by Yoshio Hayakawa, Print, c. 1966

His use of color is flat and varied, with some work painted with less saturated color while others feature a much brighter palette. However, even with these pieces the style is distinctly organic and the imagery so deliberately Japanese. The elements of Western design and art that Hayakawa incorporated into his work was secondary to his overarching Eastern style.

Despite his focus on Japanese stylistic elements and imagery, Hayakawa broke ground in Western circles. After World War II, the United States and Europe had strained ties with Japan. Hayakawa was one of the first Japanese designers to be introduced to these Western societies while world relationships were still strained.[10] He was also the first Japanese member of the Alliance Graphique Internationale, a global organization for graphic artists and designers, started and based in Europe.[11] Though Hayakawa's international recognition never resulted in international awards, he won many Japanese awards over the course of his career, such as the Bronze and Silver Medals from the Art Directors Club of Tokyo, the Book Design Award from the Ministry of Industry and Culture in Tokyo, and the Culture Award from the Kodansha Publishing Company.[12]

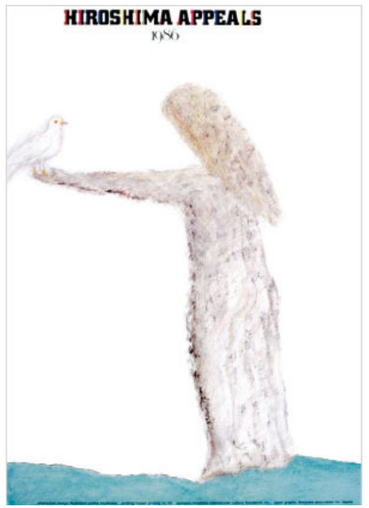
Effect on Japan

While Hayakawa received Western praise throughout his career, he still primarily focused on personal work and collaborative projects to help rebuild Japan. The country was heavily feeling the affects of World War II even decades after its surrender. In 1951 he lent a hand in establishing the Japanese Advertising Artists Club, an organization that helped build the importance of Japanese graphic and advertising design as Japan's economy came back in the fifties.[13] The organization drew attention to both the necessity of design as Japan came into the second half of the twentieth century, and worked to get it on the Japanese media's radar as the economy progressed.

In 1970 Hayakawa was on the planning committee for a Japanese exhibition at Expo '70, which was a world's fair held in Osaka, with the theme of "Progress and Harmony for Mankind" and an emphasis on looking towards the future. It was Japan's first world's fair, and featured displays of technological innovation, scientific accomplishments, and art. In part, Expo '70 reflected Japan's changing attitudes since World War II, as well as its efforts to rebuild after the devastation of the forties.[14]

Following the trend of promoting a more peaceful future for not only Japan but also the world, Hayakawa was one of the collaborators involved in a poster project titled "Hiroshima Appeals." Functioning as a joint effort between the Japan Graphic Designers Association Inc. (led at the time by president Yusaku Kamekura, who also designed the first poster) and the Hiroshima International Cultural Foundation, the project sought to use the tragedy of the nuclear bombings on Hiroshima and Nagasaki as a jumping off point for discussion. Starting in 1983, a member of the JAGDA was chosen to design and release one poster a year until 1991, when the project was temporarily disbanded until 2005.[15] Its main purpose was to promote peace both at home in Japan and abroad, and also help continue the conversation on the future of nuclear weapons that was on the forefront of many world leaders' minds.[16] Hayakawa designed the 1986 poster, featuring a vague, shadowy figure reaching out towards a dove.

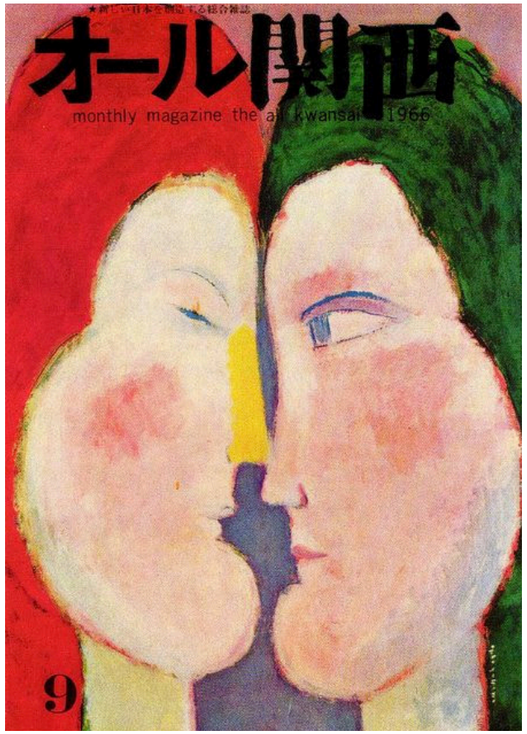
Aside from his many projects, Hayakawa was a full-time lecturer at the University of Fine Arts in Kyoto for 17 years between 1953 and 1970. He was also a part time lecturer at the University of Fine Arts in his hometown of Osaka starting in 1964.[17] From this position, he not only helped shape the minds of Japan's future artists and designers, but also continued to provide an alternative to fully Westernizing Japan's artistic world.



Top: "Hiroshima Appeals - 1986" by Yoshio Hayakawa, Print, c. 1986

Bottom: A celebration of the 200th anniversary of the artist Sharaku's work by Yoshio Hayakawa, Print, c. 1995

Over the course of Yoshio Hayakawa's long life, he helped rebuild Japan in the wake of World War II, increased artistic Westernization, and brought attention to the threat of nuclear war. Since he lived and worked during a turbulent time in Japanese history, his designs and illustrations reflected an emotional progression of coming to terms with a changing world. His style represents his love for Japan, and his actions show a man who wanted to work to improve his country through art and design. Based on his intentions, it's no wonder that his influence continues years after his death, where many contemporary designers carry out the same ideals that he represented.



Left: "11th Kimono Show" by Yoshio Hayakawa for the Kintetsu Department Store, Lithograph c. 1953

Right: Magazine cover for All Kwansai by Yoshio Hayakawa, Print, c. 1966

Although my expression takes various forms depending on the purpose of the message, I strive for human warmth in all cases.[18]

–Yoshio Hayakawa