

American Imagery?

40 years of Pop Art in Japan

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Pop art is an art form that was first emerged in Britain and the United States. It was the first art that presents a challenge to traditions of fine art by including imagery from popular culture. The concept of Pop art refers not as much to the art itself as to the attitudes that led to it. With the rise of mass culture movement, Pop art rapidly burst in the in 1960s. There are impressively famous American Pop art artists such as Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, and Jasper Johns etc. However, Pop art in the United States declined gradually from the early 1970s. On the other hand, Pop art in Japan has been developed for the long term. It seemed that “Japanese Pop” has become an independent trend of Pop art. This essay discusses the development of Japanese Pop art sometimes in comparison with Pop art in the United States.

The first section discusses the importance of Pop art (especially Pop art in Japan) and then will define the questions and organization of this essay. Pop art is still clearly an important and popular art style today, especially in Japan, as there are special exhibitions crowded with many customers. Pop art was a particular art form because it was the first art form that put everyday life objects as the subjects of art and made all people, regardless of the rich or the poor, audience. It was first emerged in the United States but today, it seems that pop art in Japan is more successful. Why does this happen? This is the main question of this essay. Also, it sometimes offers art to be commercial. Modern society is blatantly commercial. Then, why shouldn't art be, too?

The second section focuses on the history of western art in Japan. To follow the Japanese art history until Pop art came to Japan helps to discuss how and why the development happened and what kind of impact the development had in art in Japan. Traditionally, Japan developed its special art form as typified by Hanga and Ukiyo-e. However, as the Edo period finished, people became inclined to take in everything new from the West, including in art. For about 80 years, Japan tended to be interested in Western art from Europe and followed it. But after the WWII, the trend

shifted and Japan began to follow the United States. There was an increasing truth that the United States would be the real influence on Japanese art and Japan tended to appreciate the “modernist products” in the United States including ideas and art. It was the time that Pop art was introduced to Japan.

The third section analyses the specific artists of Pop art in Japan, Yokoo Tadanori and Murakami Takashi. To examine their Pop art work, finding the “Japanese” characteristic in their work is required. In Japan, Pop art was evolved from the country’s prominent avant-garde scene. There are many Japanese artists who influenced and are influenced by the movement. Yokoo Tadanori made some great Japanese Pop art posters that represents the cultural/social/economical change of Japan as pop “of” Japan. Murakami Takashi has structured a term named “Superflat” and built his position as the most well-known Japanese contemporary artists today.

The fourth section discusses Japanese reaction to Japanese Pop art. Also, in this section, aftermath of Pop art both in the United States and in Japan will be taken under consideration. Since the 60s, Yokoo has been a trendsetter approaching superstar status, and powerfully influenced the younger generation. As the fact that Yokoo has been long-lived in the art scene in Japan, there has to be people’s continuous interests in his work. Murakami has now become god-like artist of Japanese subculture art, so of Japanese Pop art. Pop art has fit in better in Japan as its concept and Japan’s feature as a country are in a good chemistry. Pop art in Japan has been a part of Japanese experience while in the United States it was a contemporary trend.