Universität Zürich[UZH]

Chair in East Asian Art History

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Rämistrasse 73
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Yodogawa Technique, *Chinu Osaka Bay*, Installation, 2007.

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Lecture
Spring 2025

Before and After Nature: Ecocritical Perspectives on Art in Japan

Prof. Dr. Ewa Machotka

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"Before and After Nature: Ecocritical Perspectives on Art in Japan"

Instructor:	Prof. Dr. Ewa Machotka
Contact:	ewa.machotka@khist.uzh.ch
Class time:	Tuesdays, 12:15-13:45
Location:	TBA
Language:	English
Format:	On-campus

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course critically examines the relationship between visual arts and environmental history in Japan through an ecocritical lens, while problematizing the concept of "nature." It explores how the natural environment—including plants, human and non-human animals, microorganisms, and non-living elements such as air, water, soil, minerals, and sunlight—has been represented, constructed, and engaged with across different historical periods, media and uses. The course spans a wide array of artistic forms, from traditional landscape paintings, architecture, and gardens to contemporary design, sustainable architecture, and environmental art.

Japan, celebrated for its deep cultural affinities with "nature" expressed through its rich visual arts and praised for advancements in green technologies, has also been criticized for overexploitation of resources. This dual position places Japan at the center of contemporary sustainability discourse. As a result, it provides a compelling subject for exploring the interactions between human and non-human worlds in Japanese art, with a focus on pressing environmental issues such as pollution, waste, deforestation, biodiversity loss, climate change, and social inequalities.
By engaging with these themes, students will be invited to critically analyze visual artifacts, challenge conventional understandings of the nature-culture divide, and place Japanese visual culture within broader theoretical frameworks, including colonialism, nationalism, and globalization.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

The course aims to:

- introduce students to current discourse in environmental humanities, providing relevant approaches and methodologies to analyse how art engages with the environment and fostering critical reflection on the benefits and risks of art's involvement in environmental discourse and practice.
- familiarize students with ecocritical perspectives in Japanese art and visual culture, building awareness of the epistemological and material specificities that shape these perspectives and positioning them within global environmental frameworks.
- develop critical thinking skills and an ability to communicate ideas orally and in writing.

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TEACHING AND EXAMINATION:

- Instructions are given in the form of a lecture.
- The lectures will be delivered in English.
- The students should read the assigned materials in time for class.
- The course is examined through a written exam. The exam will take place on **Tuesday, May 20th, 2025** (during the class).

NOTES ON READINGS:

- Course readings are listed below (see "Course schedule").
- Please find all required readings in OLAT.
- Students are asked to read at least one required reading before each class.
- Recommended readings are envisioned as additional references for those who are interested in each topic, and therefore they will not be discussed in the final exam.
- New resources may be added to the course.

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COURSE SCHEDULE
Incl. REQUIRED/RECOMMENDED READINGS (WEEKLY)

Session 1: Intro to the Course
Tuesday, 25.02.2025, 12:15-13:45

Required reading/viewing:
Rebekka, Nanna. "Artist Yuko Mohri: Emergency at the Everyday." Posted June 4, 2024, by Louisiana Channel. YouTube, 7:00. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oEYjaVI5bXs.
"Making Peace with Nature." Posted February 18, 2021, by UN Environment Programme. YouTube, 1:44. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SqHnmN2A5Yw&t=5s.
UN. "Take Action for the Sustainable Development Goals." Accessed February 2, 2025. https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/.

Session 2: Between Ecocriticism and Environmental Art History
Tuesday, 04.03.2025, 12:15-13:45

Required readings:
Braddock, Alan C. "Ecocritical Art History." *American Art* 23, no. 2 (2009): 24–28. https://doi.org/10.1086/605707.

Kusserow, Karl, ed. "Introduction." In *Picture Ecology. Art and Ecocriticism in Planetary Perspective*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021, 8–23.

Sörlin, Sverker. "Environmental Humanities: Why Should Biologists Interested in the Environment Take the Humanities Seriously?" *BioScience* 62, iss. 9 (2012): 788–789.

Recommended readings:
Braddock, Alan C. *Implication: An Ecocritical Dictionary for Art History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023. https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.3102555.
Emmett, Robert and David Nye. *The Environmental Humanities. A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017.
Lee, De-nin D., ed. *Eco-Art History in East and Southeast Asia*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019.

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Session 3: Japan and The Anthropocene
Tuesday, 11.03.2025, 12:15-13:45

Required readings:

Heise, Ursula K. "Comparative Ecocriticism in the Anthropocene." In *Komparatistik: Literaturwissenschaft.* Heidelberg: Universitätsbibliothek Johann Christian Senckenberg, 2013, 19–30. https://publikationen.ub.uni-frankfurt.de/opus4/frontdoor/deliver/index/docId/43651/file/K_2013_19-30_Heise.pdf.

Hudson, Mark, Junzō Uchiyama, Kati Lindström, Takamune Kawashima, Ian Reader, Tinka Delakorda, Danièle Martin, J. Christopher Gillam, Linda Gilaizeau, Ilona R. Bausch et al. "Global Processes of Anthropogenesis Characterise the early Anthropocene in the Japanese Islands." *Humanities and Social Sciences Communities* 9, art. 84 (2022). https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-022-01094-8.

Knight, Catherine. "The Nature Conservation Movement in Post-war Japan." *Environment and History* 16, no. 3 (2010): 349–370.

Recommended readings:

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. "Postcolonial Studies and the Challenge of Climate Change." *New Literary History* 43, no. 1 (Winter 2012): 1–18.

Haraway, Donna, Noboru Ishikawa, Scott F. Gilbert, Kenneth Olwig, Anna L. Tsing, and Nils Bubandt. "Anthropologists Are Talking – About the Anthropocene." *Ethnos* 81, iss. 3 (2016): 535–564. https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2015.1105838.

Hudson, Mark. "Placing Asia in the Anthropocene: Histories, Vulnerabilities, Responses." *Journal of Asian Studies* 73, no. 4 (2014): 941–962. https://www.jstor.org/stable/43553461?seq=1.

Session 4: Art as Environmental Advocacy and Action
Tuesday, 18.03.2025, 12:15-13:45

Required readings:

Borggreen, Gunhild. "Art and Consumption in Post-Bubble Japan: From Postmodern Irony to Shared Engagement." In *Consuming Life in Post-Bubble Japan: A Transdisciplinary Perspective.* Edited by Katarzyna J. Cwiertka and Ewa Machotka. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018, 175–94. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv56fgjm.13.

Hjorth, Larissa, Sarah Pink, Kristen Sharp, and Linda Williams. "Art, Critique, and Climate Change." In *Screen Ecologies: Art, Media, and the Environment in the Asia-Pacific Region*. Edited by Larissa Hjorth, Sarah Pink, and Kristen Sharp. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2016, 109–130.

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Machotka, Ewa. "Consuming Eco-Art: Satoyama at the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale 2012." In *Consuming Life in Post-Bubble Japan: A Transdisciplinary Perspective.* Edited by Katarzyna J. Cwiertka and Ewa Machotka. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018, 215–236. .https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv56fgjm.15.

Recommended readings:

Brown, Andrew. *Art & Ecology Now*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2014.

Hjorth, Larissa, Sarah Pink, and Kristen Sharp, eds. *Screen Ecologies: Art, Media, and the Environment in the Asia-Pacific Regio*n. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2016.

Tomii, Reiko. "Localizing Socially Engaged Art: Some Observations on Collective Operations in Prewar and Postwar Japan." *Field: A Journal of Socially-Engaged Art Criticism,* iss. 7 (Spring 2017). https://field-journal.com/issue-7/localizing-socially-engaged-art-some-observations-on-collective-operations-in-prewar-and-postwar-japan/.

Session 5: Crafting (Un)Sustainable Futures: Design Materialities

Tuesday, 25.03.2025, 12:15-13:45

Required readings:

Guth, Christine. "Natural Resources." In *Craft Culture in Early Modern Japan: Materials, Makers, and Mastery.* Oakland: University of California Press, 2021, 21–56. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1nh3m22.6.

Machotka E. "Glocal Identities: The Visual Languages of Contemporary Packaging in Japan." In *Too Pretty to Throw Away: Packaging Design from Japan*. Edited by Katarzyna Cwiertka and Ewa Machotk. Krakow: Museum of Japanese Art and Technology, 2016, 44–73. https://doi.org/10.5167/uzh-265869

Recommended readings:

Guth, Christine. *Craft Culture in Early Modern Japan: Materials, Makers, and Mastery.* Oakland: University of California Press, 2021.

Morris-Suzuki, Tessa. "Concepts of Nature and Technology in Pre-industrial Japan." *East Asian History*, iss. 1 (1991): 81–97.

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Session 6: Imagining the Multispecies World
Tuesday, 01.04.2025, 12:15-13:45

Required readings:

Cortés Zulueta, Concepción. "Two Artists, Two Ecologies, And a Shared Empathy Towards Non-human Animals' Agencies: Yanagi Yukinori and Liang Shaoji." *Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* 3, iss. 3 (2016): 377–387. E-Journal.

Marcon, F. "All Creatures Great and Small: Tokugawa Japan and Its Animals." In *The Life of Animals in Japanese Art.* Edited by Robert T. Singer and Masatomo Kawai. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019, tba.

Müller, Doreen. "Singing Frogs: Approaches to Regisgtering Animals in The Nihon Sankai Meisan zue." In *Picturing Animals and Plants in Early Modern China and Japan: Innovations, Experiments, and Anxieties*. Edited by Doreen Müller and Lin Fan. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2025, tba.

Recommended readings:

Braddock, Alan C. "Memory: Remembering Biodiversity." In *Implication: An Ecocritical Dictionary for Art History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023. https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.3102555.11.

Müller, Doreen and Lin Fan, eds. *Picturing Animals and Plants in Early Modern China and Japan*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2025.

Singer, Robert T. and Masatomo Kawai, eds. *The Life of Animals in Japanese Art*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019.

Session 7: Building with and Against Nature: Architecture
Tuesday, 08.04.2025, 12:15-13:45

Required readings:

Honda, Eiko. "Political Ecology of Art and Architecture in Japan: 100 Years Ago and Now." *Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* 3, no. 3 (2016): 243–264. E-Journal.

Houdart, Sophie. "How (Far) Does Culture Go? Kengo Kuma and His Architecture." *Perspecta* 44 (2011): 22–196. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41662943.

Wendelken, Cherie. "The Tectonics of Japanese Style: Architect and Carpenter in the Late Meiji Period." *Art Journal* 55, no. 3 (1996): 28–37. https://doi.org/10.2307/777763.

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Recommended readings:

Isozaki, Arata. *Japan-ness in Architecture.* Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007.

Kohte, Susanne, Hubertus Adam, and Daniel Hubert. In *Encounters and Positions: Architecture in Japan*. Berlin: Birkhäuser, 2019. http://doi.org/10.1515/9783035607154.

Reynolds, Jonathon. "Can Architecture Be Both Modern and 'Japanese'?" In *Since Meiji: Perspectives on Japanese Visual Arts, 1868–2000*. Edited by J. Thomas Rimer. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012, 315–339. https://doi.org/10.21313/hawaii/9780824834418.003.0013.

Session 8: Curating Nature in the Museum

Individual exercise to be conducted any time before 25.04.2025

Visit to the Museum Rietberg to be conducted individually before **25.04.2025**. A short, written reflection (ca. 300 words) on the question of the application of ecocritical perspectives in the Museum displays will be part of the final exam (it will function as one of the exam tasks).

Required readings:

Akiko, Kasuya. "Artistic Recycling in Japan Today: A Curator's Perspective." In *Consuming Life in Post-Bubble: A Transdisciplinary Perspective*. Edited by Katarzyna J. Cwiertka and Ewa Machotka. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018, 237–252. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv56fgjm.16.

Newell, Jennifer, Libby Robin and Kirsten Wehner. "Introduction: Curating Connections in a Climate-changed World." In *Curating the Future: Museums, Communities and Climate Change.* Edited by Jennifer Newell, Libby Robin and Kirsten Wehner. London: Routledge, 2016, 1–16.

Recommended readings/viewing:

Mori Art Museum 20th Anniversary IAC Symposium. "What Does Sustainability Mean for Museums? Part 2: The Climate Crisis and Museums' New Stance." Posted November 12, 2024, by Mori Art Museum, YouTube, 1:30:56. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VMRuy6oaqh4.

Newell, Jennifer, Libby Robin and Kirsten Wehner, eds. *Curating the Future: Museums, Communities and Climate Change*. London: Routledge, 2016.

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Session 9: Culturing the Human and Non-Human Interactions: Gardens
Tuesday, 29.04. 2025, 12:15-13:45

Required readings:

Watanabe, Toshio. "The Modern Japanese Garden." In *Since Meiji: Perspectives on Japanese Visual Arts, 1868–2000*. Edited by J. Thomas Rimer. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012, 340–360. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824861025-015.

Saitō, Yuriko. "Japanese Gardens: The Art of Improving Nature." In *Japanese Environmental Philosophy*. Edited by J. Baird Calllicott and James McRae. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017, 145–158.

Recommended readings:

Braddock, Alan C. "Animacy: Partner, Person, Subject." In *Implication: An Ecocritical Dictionary for Art History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023. https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.3102555.6.

Wybe, Kuitert. *Japanese Gardens and Landscapes, 1650–1950*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017.

—— *Themes, Scenes and Taste in the History of Japanese Garden Art.* Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1988.

Sesion 10: Problematizing Concepts: Nature, Art, Japan
Tuesday, 06.05.2025, 12:15-13:45

Required readings:

Kataoka, Mami. "Introduction." In *Sensing Nature: Rethinking the Japanese Perception of Nature.* Tokyo: Mori Art Museum, 2010, tba.

Satō, Dōshin. "Art and Social Class. The Class System in Early Modern Japan and the Formation of "Art." In *Modern Japanese Art and the Meiji State: The Politics of Beauty.* Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2011, 66–95.

Shimizu, Yoshiaki. "Japan in American Museums: But Which Japan?" *The Art Bulletin* 83, no. 1 (2001): 123–34. https://doi.org/10.2307/3177193

Recommended readings:

Brunn, Olle and Arne Kalland. "Images of Nature: An Introduction to the Study of Man-Environment Relations in Asia." In *Asian Perceptions of Nature: A Critical Approach.* Edited by Ole Bruun and Arne Kalland. New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 1995, 1–24.

Latour, Bruno. "First Lecture: On the Instability of the (Notion of) Nature." In *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018, 7–40.

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Morton, Timothy. *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009.

Satō, Dōshin. *Modern Japanese Art and the Meiji State: The Politics of Beauty.* Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2011.

Session 11-12: Conference "Korean Wave(s)? Global Itineraries of Korean Art and Culture"
Friday 16th and Saturday 17th of May 2025

Instead of a regular class the students will have an opportunity to participate in the Conference organized by the Chair for East Asian Art History on **Friday 16th and Saturday 17th of May 2025**. The students are expected to attend at least 4 presentations by the invited scholars including at least one keynote speech. The Conference will be held at the Museum Rietberg and at UZH. Details on the programme and venues can be found on the KGOA website.

Conference outline:
The Conference "Korean Wave(s)? Global Itineraries of Korean Art and Culture" organized in conjunction with the exhibition "Hallyu – The Korean Wave" held at the Museum Rietberg in Zurich aims to problematize the exhibition by exploring global entanglements of Korean art and culture(https://rietberg.ch/en/exhibitions/2025-hallyu). It engages with the notion of "object itinerary" (Joyce 2015)[1] as a tool for analysis of transcultural exchange, which offers a constructive framework for discussing the production, dissemination, and reception of art in a global perspective. This way the Conference conceptualizes the phenomenon of the Korean Wave as part of a continuum of regional and global cultural exchange that has been ongoing throughout Korean history from its earliest days, while critically reflecting on the notion of the 'wave,' as an analytical instrument used in the context of transcultural study of art. These issues demand critical examination and will form the core focus of the Conference, which will examine mobilities of art objects through different environments over time. This exploration will encompass their production, circulation, and transformation as they traverse various cultural and social spaces within East Asia and beyond. Importantly, these concerns are relevant not only to the Korean Wave but also contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the global entanglements of Korean art and culture. This includes their positioning and role within the broader narratives of global art history, as well as the processes of transcultural exchange and globalization at large.

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[1] Rosemary A Joyce, *Things in Motion: Object Itineraries in Anthropological Practice* (Santa Fe: SAR Press, 2015), tba.

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Session 13: 20.05 Final Exam
Tuesday, 20.05.2025, 12.15-13.15

Session 14: 27.05 Final Exam Resit
Tuesday, 27.05.2025, 12.15-13.15
