

Bye Bye Kitty!!! Between Heaven and Hell in Contemporary Japanese Art **Introduction for Educators**

Recently, much of what has come to represent the gestalt of contemporary Japanese art outside of Japan in the international art world and main stream media is dominated by expressions of subversive *kawaii* ("cute" pop-culture) and *otaku* (highly introverted, obsessive manga and anime fans) subculture.

Bye Bye Kitty!!! Between Heaven and Hell in Contemporary Japanese Art endeavors to give voice to artists working in other, divergent modalities, all of whom are engaged in explicitly critical approaches to making art. Notable for its variety, much of the work on display melds traditional materials and techniques with decidedly edgy subject matter and current-day perspectives on social and political topics.

The exhibition is organized into three thematically overlapping sections, *Critical Memory*, *Threatened Nature*, and *Unquiet Dream*. The 16 emerging and mid-career artists represented provide commentary on subjects including corporate and public policy, the role of women in Japanese society, suppressed historical and cultural narratives, and environmental issues.

The 16 featured artists are Makoto Aida, Manabu Ikeda, Tomoko Kashiki, Rinko Kawauchi, Haruka Kojin, Kumi Machida, Yoshitomo Nara, Kohei Nawa, Motohiko Odani, Hiraki Sawa, Chiharu Shiota, Tomoko Shioyasu, Hisashi Tenmyouya, Yamaguchi Akira, Miwa Yanagi and Tomoko Yoneda.

To view an online image gallery visit <http://byebyekitty-art.com/artists.htm>.

Use the related questions below for self-guided visits to the gallery.

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF SECTIONS

Critical Memory

In this section, artists examine aspects of perceived societal expectations in urban cultural life, gender roles, and engage in social critique on a range of issues.

Related Questions:

- Identify the key messages in a given artwork. Consider how the artist expresses his/her critique formally (choice of media, style, iconography, etc.)
- What issues does the artist raise?
- What is the artist's position as seen in the artwork? Does the work make a statement? Pose questions and offer answers?
- How do you know? (Give evidence based on what you can see in the artwork.)
- How might someone with an opposing viewpoint represent their ideas in art?
- Is this a topic or issue also faced by people in the U.S.? Explain.

Threatened Nature

Artists in the section deploy a range of strategies and media to evoke notions of "Nature."

Generate a list of keywords for this section. Suggested choices could include: Beauty, Decay, Entropy, Fantasy, Fragility, Mutation, Myth, Overgrowth, and Primordial.

Related Questions:

- Choose one keyword and match it to an artwork in this section. Discuss the connections.
- Choose two artworks by different artists in this section. How does each artist describe or comment on nature? Do they share common elements (e.g., water or foliage)? If so, do the elements have the same meaning in each case?
- Describe the mood of each artwork.
- Does one artwork describe an attitude close to your own thoughts or feelings about nature? Explain.
- What are the elements of fantasy in the works of these artists?
- How does the artist distinguish between fantasy and reality in the artwork?

The Unquiet Dream

Do nightmares reveal subconscious anxieties and fears? Artworks in this section employ dream-like imagery to suggest surreal narratives derived from real-life problems and challenges.

Related Questions:

- What are the anxiety-producing circumstances or conditions referenced in artworks in this section?
- What are the artists' intentions and results?
- Discuss the media used by each artist.
- How do the artists mediate or transform their fears artistically?
- Is there use of symbolism? Metaphor? Describe and explain.
- How does the act of transformation differ depending on the use of sculpture, photography or video?

BOOKS FOR EDUCATORS

Elliot, David. *Bye Bye Kitty!!! Between Heaven and Hell in Contemporary Japanese Art*. New York: Japan Society; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.

Murakami, Takashi. *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture*. New York: Japan Society; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.