WHOSE JAPAN IS

IT ANYWAY?

The translation of the "Cool Japan"-phenomenon in
the Cool Japan-exhibition

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Preface and acknowledgements

I started my academic career as a BA student of Japan studies, where I mostly took culture and history-centered courses, in addition to the required language components. After graduation I decided I wanted to specialize in museology, so I applied for a Premaster that would prepare me for the MA Arts and Cultures: Museums and Collection, in which I am currently enrolled. In addition to a seminar, my Premaster existed of an internship at the Volkenkunde Museum at Leiden. I spent months working as a researcher, working on research projects regarding themes and objects that would be included in the Cool Japan-exhibition under the guidance of curator Japan and Korea, Daan Kok, who taught me a lot about research and helped nurture a love for museum work. I worked extensively on the "Monsters"-room, the "Warriors"-room, in addition to smaller research projects regarding specific objects and created the large timeline in the Introductory room. It is from this background that I have decided to revisit the exhibition and critically analyze it from a scholarly perspective.

Contents

Introduction

On April 14, 2017, the "Cool Japan" exhibition in the Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden opened its doors after much fanfare.[1] This exhibition was heavily marketed and was intended to attract a diverse and young crowd. This thesis will analyze this exhibition, which was chosen because the particular approach of the curators for an exhibition topic is new and intriguing: instead of trying to portray a cultural phenomenon from the perspective of the culture itself, which in this case would be Japan, they chose to make the images held in the global popular consciousness the topic of their exhibition.

The title of the exhibition, "Cool Japan", is based on how this phenomenon of global fascination with Japanese (pop) culture is usually indicated by academics and the Japanese government.[2] The subtitle of the exhibition "Global fascination in focus", implies a binary relationship between Japan as being the producer of visual culture and the rest of the world as a fascinated consumer. Instead, the exhibition deals with a phenomenon that cannot be tied to a specific demography, ethnic group or geographical location. The Cool Japan-phenomenon functions on many levels, including the grassroots level of consumption of Japanese media by individual fans, the Japanese government's attempts to capitalize on this trend, and the many artists, creators and companies responding and contributing to this fascination. The exhibition does however not just showcase the fascination with Japanese visual culture, but from its inception intends to place this fascination within a historical and cultural framework, deepening the understanding and appreciation of the imagery that the visitors are presupposed to have according to the exhibition makers.

The exhibition opens with an introductory room showcasing Japanese icons, several art objects, projections of film clips and a time-line to provide background information. The rest of the exhibition consists of seven rooms, each dedicated to a specific theme of fascination held in the (worldwide) popular consciousness. The rooms are, not in any particular order, dedicated to "Robots", "Warriors," "Monsters," "Kawaii," "Otaku," "Essence" and "The Line". Whilst the first three are self-explanatory, the latter four need further explanation. The "Kawaii"-room is dedicated

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[1] The Museum Volkenkunde, together with the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, the Wereldmuseum in Rotterdam and the Afrikamuseum in Berg en Dal are part of the same organization, the National Museum of Worldcultures. https://volkenkunde.nl/nl/tentoonstelling-cool-japan (April 17, 2018)

[2] Iwabuchi 2015, p. 423.

to the so-called cute (or in Japanese, *kawaii*) culture, which is dominant in Japanese pop culture and has had success overseas with many *kawaii* characters and products. The "Otaku"-room is also based on a Japanese word, which means (obsessed) fan, and is most often used to refer to fans of manga and anime. This room shows fan-culture in its internal variety. "Essence" on the other hand refers to the current connection between Japanese and minimalistic design, and is more focused on fashion and design objects. Lastly, "The Line" is a room dedicated to the history and development of the visual language of manga. Each room contains a mix of objects related to (pop) culture, history or art.

In order to properly analyze these rooms and their contents, my theoretical framework had to be drawn from several fields, as was required due to the complexity of the Cool Japan exhibition. In Chapter 1, I provide an overview of this theoretical framework, which is broadly speaking composed of three components: literature scholar Stanley Fish' concept of interpretive communities and museum studies theorist Eilean Hooper-Greenhill's application of it within a museum context, and African art specialist Susan Vogel's exhibition Art/Artefact (1988).

This thesis will study the exhibition to answer the question of how it has translated the Cool Japan-phenomenon in its exhibits. By looking at the way the objects have been presented and what information has been provided in the texts, I will gain a deeper appreciation of the many aspects of the phenomenon that have been incorporated in the exhibition structure. Related to this is the subquestion whose Japan is shown. This lays bare the many interpretations of Japan by different interpretive communities that have been adopted into the exhibition. Another important subquestion is to what the extent the added context truly would broaden the visitors' understanding of Cool Japan and Japanese visual culture. This exhibition required extensive research into the many themes and objects, but had to feature very short texts. This also led me to also question the level of accessible information and nuance in the provided texts.[3]

In order to answer these questions, I will use the theoretical framework to analyze the exhibition in terms of the framing of the objects, the added context, and the incorporation of interpretive communities. I aim to analyze the word choice and included information of the wall and object texts to gain a deeper understanding of the featured narratives. Each chapter shall deal with a specific aspect of the exhibition and challenge the extent to which the provided information of the

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[3] See page 46.

exhibited objects, wall texts and object texts together create a deeper understanding of the complex cultural phenomenon of Cool Japan.

Structure of the thesis

The first chapter of my thesis is dedicated to the explanation of my theoretical framework, where I will explain more extensively the theory behind my analysis of the Cool Japan-exhibition.

The second chapter will explore the concept and execution of the exhibition in the context of the current nation branding practices of the Japanese government. Through a multitude of cultural diplomatic programs, an image of Japan as a cool and harmless country is broadcasted to the rest of the world. Similarities between this diplomatic strategy and the exhibition go beyond sharing a title, as both depend on the same global fascination. This chapter will also question the extent to which the exhibition challenged this projected image or reinforced it.

The third chapter will analyze the presence of the interpretive community of fans in the exhibition. They are not just represented in the "Otaku"-room, but their experience, as I shall argue, is dominant throughout the exhibition. How the fan is defined and represented, and the inherent variety of the fan community will be explored, as well as question to what other interpretive communities are included in the exhibition.

The fourth chapter focuses on the employment of history in the exhibition, questions how Japanese history is represented, and analyzing when, how and whose history is presented to the visitors. I shall study three aspects of the exhibition: "The Line"-room and its representation of the history of manga, the samurai-exhibit that deals with an idealized cultural figure, and the history of *kawaii*-exhibit, which traces the history of *kawaii*-culture.

The fifth and final chapter shall discuss the inclusion of Japanese voices in the exhibition. Throughout the exhibition several creators, artists, fans and members of subcultures are presented with objects, interviews and narratives. Furthermore, Japanese ghost story traditions are represented without much mediation from the perspective of a Western audience. This chapter will analyze what these Japanese voices add to the respective rooms and how they relate to the Cool Japan phenomena overall.

On a more meta-level, this thesis aims to broaden our understanding of how more complex cultural phenomena could be mediated through new exhibition tactics and formulating narratives without losing sight of the important cultural nuances.

Chapter 1: Theoretical framework

Introduction

By asking whose Japan is shown in the exhibition, this thesis shall lay bare how this complex cultural concept, which cannot be defined as belonging to any one demography or nationality, has been translated into an exhibition. I have selected two key publications that will serve primarily as my theoretical framework: Eilean Hooper-Greenhill's *Museums and the interpretation of visual culture* (1992) and *Exhibiting cultures: the poetics and politics of museum display* (1991) which was edited by Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine. In addition, I have chosen to include 'Museums and community' by Elizabeth Crooke, which is a chapter from *A companion to museum studies* (2006), edited by Sharon Macdonald. This chapter provides much needed definitions and interpretations regarding communities. Together, they will form a cohesive theoretical framework with which to analyze how a complex cultural phenomenon like Cool Japan is translated into the exhibition.

Theoretical framework

Before we turn to the discussions regarding the representation of other cultures and communities, it is important to define community as a concept first. Elizabeth Crooke, professor Museum and Heritage Studies at Ulster University, shows how it has a flexible definition and cannot be restricted to singular notions such as location, ethnicity or size. In fact, she refers to George Delanty, a British sociologist, who emphasizes a range of factors that constitutes a community, including shared interests, history, ethnicity and more.[4] However, the most important type of community for this thesis is the application of Hooper-Greenhill of Fish's concept interpretive communities within a museological framework.

More broadly speaking, Ivan Karp, director of the Institute of African Studies and International Studies at Emory University, and Steven Lavine, the former president of the California Institute of the Arts, describe what they consider necessary actions for museums. They specify that this is written with the United States in mind, but such actions may apply to a more global level as well. First, they argue to strengthen institutions that give populations a chance to influence the way they are represented. Second, they argue for the expansion of the expertise in exhibiting other and

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[4] Crooke, pp. 389-390.

minority cultures, like the Ainu in Japan or the Native Americans in the USA. Third, they argue for the experimentation in museum display that would allow a multitude of voices to be heard.[5]

These steps into developing a new type of museum are echoed in the work of Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, who argues for the arrival of the so-called post museum, which can be characterized by '… its indeterminacies, fragmentation, decanonization, hybridization and constructionism.'[6] She also states that the post museum can be defined by its responsiveness, encouragement of mutually nurturing partnerships and celebration of diversity.[7] The museum would function in a cacophony of different voices, each from different points of view, different perspectives and from different organization and communities, including interpretive communities.[8]

Fish used the term of interpretive community to describe how the manner of interpreting a text is not just an action by the individual, but created in relation to a larger community of which the individual is part. This larger community exists of people who share in interpretive frames, references and place in history.[9] This interpretive community is defined by him, as a community "… who share interpretive strategies for writing texts, constituting their properties and assigning their intentions."[10]

Hooper-Greenhill explains that these communities can only be observed through their shared interpretation of specific media. She explains that when exporting this term from the field of literature studies to visual culture studies it explains how the same objects can be interpreted differently based on the interpretive communities of the observer. She also explains how the curator can create an uncomfortable environment for visitors, if they only represent their own interpretive community in the exhibits.[11] The Cool Japan-exhibition has featured a multitude of interpretations of Japan of various interpretive communities in its exhibits (see chapter 3 and 5).[12] It presented different voices and can serve as an example of how these communities can be featured in an exhibition.

"Cool Japan" is a cultural construction, which cannot be tied to one specific group, and this poses a challenge to the museum. With limited space and objects, a narrative structure must be

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[5] Karp and Lavine 1991, p. 6.
[6] Hooper-Greenhill 1992, p. 141.
[7] Ibidem, p. 153.
[8] Ibidem, p. 152.
[9] Ibidem, 120.
[10] Fish, as quoted by Hooper-Greenhill 2000, p. 119.
[11] Hooper-Greenhill 2000, pp. 121-123.
[12] See Chapter 3.

created which is not only supposed to represent the involved interpretive communities and show the visitors what "Cool Japan" entails, but also contextualize the phenomenon within a historical and cultural framework. In the following discussion, we will see how, even if the term is not used, the role of the museum as playing field of many different interpretive communities is imperative, as these communities come together to find common ground and mutual understanding.

To develop this type of exhibitions in which the multiplicity of voices is heard and represented, one must define how the communication on an exhibition level is established. Art historian Michael Baxandall argues that every anthropological exhibition is a field in which three cultural agents can be identified: first, the maker of the object, which is situated in a specific time and culture; second, the exhibitor, who exhibits the object in a specific framework; third, the audience, who interprets the object based on its own ideas, the objects' physical properties and the exhibitor's label.[13] These three agents belong to distinct interpretive communities, with the exhibitor having the task to bridge the distance between the maker of the object and the visitor.

However, communication between these three groups can be difficult. Baxandall suggests that the exhibitor should be aware of their place in the exhibition field as one of three agents and recognize the agency and preconceptions with which the label and object are being consumed by the visitors.[14] In the Cool Japan exhibition this is especially crucial, because it presents the objects not initially as the products of the maker's efforts, but frames them as aligning with the expected preconceptions of the visiting public. The exhibited images are supposed to be recognizable as representative of "Cool Japan" and are deliberately chosen to appeal to these preconceptions. It is through the "labels", as Baxandall calls the exhibition texts, that the original cultural context of the objects and exhibited imagery is supposed to be made visible to the visitors.

Baxandall also argues that by creating cross-cultural exhibitions, the difference in presented cultural systems invites the visitor to consider that their own system is one of many.[15] Karp would even argue that cross-cultural exhibitions should cause such changes in perspectives. He warns against the presupposition that the way objects from other cultures are consumed, is not how the object was originally supposed to be viewed. He argues that the point of these exhibitions is to invite an adaptation of previous knowledge systems. If the audience already had all the necessary tools to absorb its contents, having the exhibition would be pointless.[16] They both underline the necessity

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[13] Baxandall 1991, pp. 36-37.
[14] Ibidem, p. 39.
[15] Ibidem, p. 40.
[16] Karp 1991, pp. 21-23.

that the visitor has to reconfigure their interpretive framework in order to adapt the new information and cultural concepts into their presupposed knowledge systems.

Another method to circumvent the misconceptions that exist surrounding a group or community would be to exhibit an art tradition in terms of their own aesthetic and theoretical framework. Baxandall suggested this as a strategy for the exhibitor in which the visitor is intellectually stimulated by such a culturally specific concept to consume the information given in the exhibition and avoid cultural projection.[17] The beauty of this approach lies in its attempt to bring outsiders into the same interpretive community who originally consumed these objects. It is an attempt to bridge the gap between the maker of the object and the visiting audience. Whilst the Cool Japan-exhibition is light on cultural theory, it does provide historical and cultural backgrounds to the displayed objects, especially those that stem from the realm of popular culture. By defining these objects by means of their cultural origins, foreign projection of meaning is complemented by a definition stemming from the original cultural context.

Susan Vogel developed another method to address the way visitors' preconceptions regarding the exhibited culture. Her exhibition Art/Artefact (1988) is not unlike the exhibition at the Volkenkunde Museum in Leiden. Whilst the Cool Japan exhibition presented a global fascination with Japan in many forms, Art/Artefact exhibited the gaze of the Western world onto African art. Neither exhibition intended to show their topics as they were, but how they were perceived. Art/Artefact showed how the Western world had approached, interpreted and exhibited African art throughout the centuries. It was meant to showcase how our understanding of African art is just as much based on our preconceptions as it is on African sources. Her exhibition displayed how African art has been exhibited in the past centuries, and how each framework in itself is artificial and manipulative.[18] She created several different settings in which Westerners could have and have encountered African (art) objects before. This included a room set up like a natural history museum, in which African sculptures were placed close together and included informational labels and photographs, which obscured the status as art objects from these otherwise perfectly visible objects.[19]

Vogel showed in the exhibition that a variety of different interpretive (Western museum) communities throughout time each has coopted African art into their own interpretive framework.

[17] Baxandall 1991, pp. 40-41.
[18] Vogel 1991, pp. 196-198.
[19] Ibidem, pp. 196-197.

She, like Baxandall, argues that curators should be more aware of the fact that their intentions and interpretations differ from the maker of the object and that an object cannot speak for itself. [20] The exhibition shows how the setting of objects can distort one's understanding of an object. As the Cool Japan-exhibition is not supposed to represent Japan, but the image of Japan, their setting and framing are vital to ensure that the public understands this nuance. Despite a similar approach, the Cool Japan-exhibition and Art/Artefact function differently. Whilst Vogel laid bare the institutional framing of African art by institutions, the Cool Japan exhibition focuses on the framing and interpretations on a grass-roots level. However, in both cases, the Western gaze is the subject of the exhibition. By questioning how, by and for whom these objects are displayed, my analysis can uncover whose Japan is actually exhibited.

Conclusion
This chapter has given an overview of the theory that will be applied throughout this thesis. The complexity of Cool Japan demanded an alternative definition of community. Furthermore, their approach led to an emphasis on framing, both in physical presentation as textual contextualization, as the exhibition could easily reinforce preconceptions rather than change them.

With the importance of framing in mind, it may be essential to realize that the exhibition does not just share its name with the Cool Japan-phenomenon, but also with the umbrella term for pop cultural diplomacy programs of the Japanese government. Before we can turn to the Cool Japan-exhibition, we must first understand how the exhibition relates to the state-approved image of Japan.

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[20] Vogel 1991, p. 201.

Chapter 2: Cool Japan as policy

Introduction

The title of the exhibition "Cool Japan" refers to the phenomenon of global fascination with Japanese (popular) culture. However, this term is not just used by scholars and the exhibition to refer to this fascination, but has been adopted by the Japanese government as the term for a group of policies and programs aimed to use this fascination as branding to generate political influence.[21] The exhibition is aware of this diplomatic strategy of the Japanese government, and actively distances itself from it.[22] This chapter will analyze the governmental programs and question to what extent the exhibition has differentiated itself. It will also study the imagery currently projected to the rest of the world by the Japanese government and to what extent this overlaps with the imagery featured in the exhibition.

Cool branding as an engine of soft power

The "Cool Japan"-policy of the Japanese government aims to generate soft power by propagating a positive image of Japan based on the interest in Japanese popular culture. This section will describe the theory behind this diplomatic strategy.

To understand what this "Cool Japan"-policy is, an explanation of the term soft power is necessary. In 2002, journalist Douglas McGray wrote an article about the soft power potential of Japan. Soft power, as defined by political scientist Joseph S. Nye, is the ability to influence others for political and economic purposes by appealing to them through cultural and commercial channels. According to McGray, Japan had a large potential for soft power, as Japanese culture and product had undergone a surge of global popularity. He predicted that Japan would tap into this potential as "… it's hard to imagine that Japan will be content to remain so much medium and so little message."[23] This article was swiftly translated in Japanese and caused a stir with its message of the soft power potential of Japan. The Japanese government launched numerous programs that would facilitate the government's use of the generated appeal of Japanese media and products. During the Koizumi administration (2001-2006) was this "Cool Japan"-strategy firmly established.[24]

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[21] Iwabuchi 2015, p. 423.
[22] Appendix 2.a., wall text "Exporting Cool Japan"
[23] McGray 2009.
[24] Iwabuchi 2015, p. 423.

These programs can be described as being (pop) cultural diplomacy. This refers to the attainment of soft power through (pop) cultural means, or a "… focus upon projecting a selected national image by exporting appealing cultural products such as animation, TV-programs, popular music, films and fashion."[25] Projecting a certain image of one's nation to enhance its international reputation is known as nation branding.[26] By branding Japan as 'cool', says Valaskivi, they brand the nation as youthful, authentic, trendy and creative.[27] This projection of a fun and harmless Japan is also useful to smooth over communication with nations that have a shared problematic past, especially with East and Southeast Asian regions that were affected by the colonial practices of Imperialist Japan.[28] Besides many other diplomatic programs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that the popular character Doraemon was appointed as the anime ambassador and three young female fashion leaders were chosen as the "cute ambassadors". The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also started to sponsor the World Cosplay Summit that was held annually in Japan, which is the world championship for cosplay, which refers to the performance art, where one dresses and acts in homemade costumes like favorite characters from shows, comics or games.[29]

Appeal and effectiveness

Before we turn to the connection between Cool Japan the exhibition and Cool Japan the brand, it is important to get an impression of how the phenomenon of Cool Japan functions: what is its appeal and what is its actual effect?

The appeal of Japan has been discussed by scholars, and, like McGray did in his article, often they point to the accessibility of Japanese media by their adoption of Western elements.[30] This brings into question to what extent the Japanese government is truly promoting "Japanese" culture. Anne Allison, cultural anthropologist specialized in Japanese popular culture, points to the fact that a large part of Japanese popular culture was created with an active removal of any cultural specificity.[31] This 'cultural odorless-ness', as Iwabuchi had typified it, was a tactic employed in the 1990's to market Japanese products, both material and cultural, to critical foreign markets.[32] To

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[25] Iwabuchi 2015, p. 419.
[26] Ibidem, pp. 422-423.
[27] Valaskivi 2013, p. 492.
[28] Iwabuchi 2015, p. 422.
[29] Ibidem, p. 424
[30] McGray 2000.
[31] Allison 2006, p. 180
[32] Iwabuchi 2002, p. 257.

Iwabuchi, this process cannot be clearer than in Japanese animation, in which characters lack any ethnic or cultural characteristics. He argues that that made it such a successful export product.[33] Kukhee Choo, who is specialized in Japanese pop culture, points to anime as being heavily supported by the Japanese government as a representational medium.[34] With Iwabuchi's point in mind, one can question the "Japaneseness" of the image that is then being projected. The exhibition too relies heavily on imagery and association created through the media of anime and manga. Whilst now the Japanese origin of a product is the determining factor, Cool Japan might have its roots in and might continue to profit from the removal of Japanese-ness from exported products.

Allison argues that to the consumers of Cool Japan, "Japan" functions as a signifier for the real and the "phantasm", as she called it. Allison argues that the interest created by Japanese popular culture, from which the Japanese government is trying to profit, does not create any special interest in Japanese culture or nation. She explains that the fantasy appeal never completely disappears when one visits Japan, as the reality and fantasy work together to constitute its image.[35] To her, Japan functions as a "brand": it exists in an interplay between the familiar and the fantastical. Its contents are ever shifting, as its production rests on individual consumption. As such, the brand cannot be tied down and functions in such a way that its contents and impact are always changing, establishing and breaking connections between the individual consumer, the producer and the policy creator.[36]

Jonathan Abel, associate professor Comparative Literature at Pennsylvania State University, also doubts the effectiveness of the nation branding of Japan. He argues that the coolness of Japan is based around its exotic mystery. It is the dimension of the unknowable, the fantasy of Japanese pop culture that makes it so appealing for the global youth. He argues that this damages the Cool Japan diplomacy, as the intended interest in studying Japan destroys the mystic elements that made it attractive in the first place.[37]

Iwabuchi too warned that the proliferation of Japanese media culture does not translate into a desire to learn more. He argues that the popularity of Japanese pop culture may provide individuals with some understanding of Japanese culture, but could also spark indifference, othering and antagonism.[38] That being said, one can question to what extent the branding has completely failed. As Susan Napier, a well-known scholar of Japanese popular culture, found out through

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[33] Iwabuchi 2002, pp. 258-259.
[34] Choo 2018, p. 5.
[35] Allison 2006, pp. 16-17.
[36] Ibidem, p. 18.
[37] Abel, 2011.
[38] Iwabuchi 2015, p. 425.

surveys, it is usually through manga and anime that an interest in Japan as a nation and a culture is cultivated.[39] Despite his pessimism, Iwabuchi has also seen the rise of interest in courses at foreign universities that deal with Japanese popular culture. However, he criticizes them as being unaware of the inherent power relations in the playing field of globalization and into Japan itself.[40]

Outside of the effectiveness of the Cool Japan branding project, Iwabuchi also criticized the program as a whole. He points out that the program does not have any specific goals nor invites any cross-cultural dialogue.[41] This lack of focus is also observed by Kazuo Ogura, who was the head of the Japan Foundation, and directly stimulated the propagation of the Cool Japan brand.[42] It is intriguing to note that none of the scholars mentioned the potential flow of migrants to Japan, which McGray noted as a desired outcome of a well-structured soft power policy.[43]

Iwabuchi also questions the creation of a single brand of Japan, as it creates a dominant narrative that excludes cultural dissidents.[44] By presenting Japan as a cohesive brand, the image of Japan as a homogenized whole becomes easily identifiable and sellable. Any cultural minorities, such as the Ainu up north or the Okinawans down south are excluded. He sees the current reassertion of a national brand as creating mutual othering instead of cross-cultural dialogue, which ignores the "… complexity, unevenness, and diversity actually existing within Japan."[45]

Indirect agency through common sources

By questioning which media are being supported by the Japanese government, we can assess the extent to which the exhibition overlaps in its chosen imagery. Furthermore, this section will question to what extent the exhibition has distanced itself from the Cool Japan brand.

One of the most important aspects of Cool Japan as nation branding is that the phenomenon developed at a grassroots level. It were the creative industries that independently exported Japanese products such as anime, manga and TV-shows to foreign markets. As such, the Japanese government could benefit from a trend that they did not have to create. In fact, the soft power that is generated by the consumption of Japanese media and products does not need their immediate influence. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and agencies like the Japan Foundation

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[39] Iwabuchi 2015, p. 185.
[40] Iwabuchi 2010, p. 95
[41] Iwabuchi 2015, pp. 425-427.
[42] Ogura 2012.
[43] McGray 2002.
[44] Iwabuchi 2015, p. 427.
[45] Iwabuchi 2010, p. 93.

however, have claimed this trend and this makes the separation between media culture consumption and exposure to foreign cultural diplomacy difficult. Furthermore, the Cool Japan-exhibition uses the same sources of fan activity and consumption as the basis of their exhibition, as the Japanese government did for their nation branding.

The activities of the Japanese government are disjointed in a sense, as many agencies and governmental bodies have directly or indirectly used the Cool Japan-phenomena in their programs. This makes it difficult to analyze the concrete image of Japan is being propagated. Choo pointed out that anime is an important medium and also showed how manga became part of Japan's official traditional culture by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport, Science and Technology.[46] Another indicator is the Cool Japan Fund, a public-private organization founded in 2013. According to its website, the Fund's core mission is to commercialize and capture overseas demand for businesses derived from Japanese culture and lifestyle. The Fund will achieve this mission primarily by providing risk capital.[47] Their activities have to align with governmental policy, have a decent expectation of the return of investments and broaden the sphere of influence and popularity of Japanese products. As this project directly relates to "… facilitating further overseas expansion and helping broadcast the overall appeal of the Japan brand," the projects that they have greenlit can be an indicator of what type of businesses agree with the brand that the government wishes to disseminate. [48]

The Fund's project ranges from supporting content creators, fashion brands, Japanese food stores, music platforms, an international broadcasting network called Waku Waku Japan, and more.[49] These projects share the intention to popularize Japanese content and media. One project that is particularly interesting is Tokyo Otaku Mode, a website and Facebook-page that has information regarding anime and manga, sells licensed merchandise and provides creators associated with Cool Japan brand the opportunity to sell their wares.[50] The exhibition did not feature any Japanese food culture and only had a single screen dedicated to showing Japanese music videos, but pop cultural merchandise, manga, and anime dominate the exhibition. In this way, the exhibition used many of the same sources that the Japanese government uses as well.

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[46] Choo 2018, p. 5.
[47] https://www.cj-fund.co.jp/en/about/cjfund.html (February 23, 2018)
[48] Idem.
[49] Idem.
[50] https://www.cj-fund.co.jp/en/investment/deal_list/vol01/ (February 23, 2018)

However, as Saito writes, the Cool Japan Fund is plagued by unsuccessful investments that are often pet projects of the directors of the Fund.[51] It may indicate the kind of projects the directors want to promote, but the Fund also acts as a representation of the lack of focus Iwabuchi and Ogura criticized. It is also an example of how the government programs cannot benefit without understanding of the processes underlying the Cool Japan-fandom.

Meanwhile the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have appointed "ambassadors of cute"; three women, each representing a different style. Shizuka Fujioka dresses in a variation of high school uniforms, Misaki Aoki in the Lolita style and Yu Kimura in a Harajuku style.[52] These three women are sent around the world to popularize their style in the name of Japanese diplomacy.[53] Two of the women represent specific subcultures, Lolita and Harajuku that may be popular and recognizable in certain circles globally, but are in Japan itself not as successful. By promoting these styles as being representative, the Ministry is actively promoting the illusion of a young, cool and quirky Japan. The exhibition may have no direct ties to Japanese governmental agencies, but it is no question that the exhibition makers have chosen similar representational subcultures. The exhibition shows Lolita-fashion and contains an in-depth interview with a popular *decora* style-fashionista.[54] This, as Abel observes, despite the fact that these subcultures may be as incomprehensible to foreign consumers as they are to the Japanese populace.[55]

In the "Otaku"-room a large section is dedicated to cosplay, with an installation showcasing Dutch participants in the World Cosplay Summit, which has direct governmental backing. In other words, they highlight a certain type of performance art that has been deemed as representational practices by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This type of shared sources of cultural imagery could unintentionally make the Cool Japan-exhibition an indirect agent of the Japanese nation branding policy.

However, this agency is disrupted by the provided context of the exhibition regarding cosplay, fashion styles and other dominant images stemming from pop culture. The exhibition texts point for instance to the American roots of cosplay, undercutting the inherent assumption that this

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[51] Saito 2017.
[52] Lolita-style is a style of clothing that is inspired by Victorian dress.
The Harajuku-style takes its name after the Harajuku-district in Tokyo and exists of many different street fashion styles, which range from punk to cute.
Godoy 2007, pp. 12-13.
[53] https://www.ft.com/content/06978f58-384d-11df-8420-00144feabdc0 (February 23, 2018)
[54] *Decora* being a style of cute clothes, bright colors and an emphasis on (plastic) accessories.
[55] Abel 2011.

is typically Japanese.[56] The Lolita and *decora*-style are treated as the subcultures they are, with references to the fact that they are more popular overseas than in Japan itself.[57] The exhibition's critical reflection on these shared elements of the Japan brand potentially prevents any indirect cooperation with the Japanese government. That being said, the background information is put in object texts, and one can question to what extent these are read by the visitors. Without the reading of the object texts, any perspective is lost in the visual spectacle of the exhibition, fortifying the branding of Japan by propagating it in a Western museum.

Conclusion

The popularity of Japanese pop culture inspired the Japanese government to adopt a Cool Japan-branding as a diplomatic policy. It has promoted industries like anime and cultural practices like cosplay, with many scholars questioning its effectiveness. The Cool Japan-exhibition adopted similar cultural sources in their exhibition, so they could become indirect agents, despite efforts to break away from such a connection by being reflective in the exhibition texts.

As stated before, the Cool Japan-phenomenon mostly functions on the level of the consumption and practices of individual fans. Their experiences as a community can be considered as constitutive to the Cool Japan phenomenon. The next chapter shall focus on the experiences of these fans and the inclusion of their interpretation of Japan.

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[56]Appendix 2.b., wall text, "Cosplay"
[57] Appendix 2.c., wall text, "Cute street fashion"

Chapter 3: Cool Japan as embedded fan experience

Introduction

The Cool Japan-phenomenon exists in a complex web of actors, practices and objects, yet the primary community that can be recognized as being constitutive is the Cool Japan fan community, often called *otaku*. In this chapter, I will argue that this community is an interpretive community. The exhibition had to represent their overall characteristics, their practices and internal variety. Furthermore, it was important that the portrayal was both recognizable for visitors that belonged to that community and relatable for the visitors that belonged to other interpretive communities as well. As the *otaku*-community is but one of many to which this phenomenon relates, the exhibition incorporated other interpretations of Cool Japan as well.

The "Otaku"-room: curating fan-experience

The exhibition is about the global fascination with Japanese visual culture. While there are many dimensions in degree of interest, which will be addressed later in this chapter, the main characters of this exhibition are the *otaku*. Never is this group better represented than in the "Otaku"-room, the last room one can visit. The main text of the room quickly explains what *otaku* means (see page 2) and points out that the word *otaku* has had a negative connotation, but is currently adopted as a proud nickname. This text emphasizes that these *otaku* do not only consume, but also points to their production of subtitles for films and series, creation of cosplay outfits and their drawing of own manga.[58]

In the main wall text the room is described as being a small scale 'con', which is a convention, or event, where fans can meet, buy merchandise, participate in various activities related to their fandom, such as workshops or competitions, and attend lectures.[59] The exhibition room (see figure 3.1.) exists of several exhibits. While one wall is stacked with bookshelves filled with manga, another is partly dedicated to a large screen displaying Japanese videoclips. In one corner one can play all kinds of arcade games, in another one it is possible to study the intricately made cosplay costumes. An apparent outlier in the so-called con-room is the wall dedicated to the history of fan culture in Japan, but as Napier explains, cons regularly include exhibits and lectures regarding

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[58] Appendix 3.a., wall text, "Welcome to the world of the devoted fan"
[59] Idem.

Japanese culture, such as a performance of a tea ceremony.[60] Thus, whether or not this was done consciously, the inclusion of this exhibit only elevates the con-experience.

Figure 3.1. The "Otaku"-room

As I have discussed in Chapter 1, Susan Vogel has shown in her exhibition Art/Artefact (1988) that the interpretation of objects depends on their staging. By mimicking a con, this exhibition tries to involve the visitor in the mindset and experience of the *otaku*. This room curates two separate experiences in a sense. Whilst the history of fan culture, the video screen and cosplay exhibit cast the visitor in the role of an onlooker and curate an experience not unlike the one of a museum visitor, this room, and explicitly the main text of the room, also invites the visitor to participate in fan activities and revisit these exhibits from that viewpoint. The wall of manga is accompanied by a table and chairs, so that the visitors can take a moment to read and discover manga. The arcade games too allow for direct interplay between fan and museum visitor activity. These make the formal division between the visitor and the exhibited community blur.

Interestingly, the text specifies that the reader should unleash their inner fan. This allows both members of the Cool Japan-fan community and the more casual consumer of Japanese pop culture to feel invited. The introduction text of the history of Japanese fan culture holds a positive spin on the idea of devoted fandom as well. Using utterances such as "It's wonderful to be a fan" implies that fandom is a desirable practice. However, the Dutch introductory text includes the word

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[60] Napier 2007, p. 152.

"*fanatiek*" which literally means fanatical, that has a far more negative connotation than "devoted". It is this emphasis on fanaticism and obsession ('Obsessing over your idol') that could be considered problematic.[61] Their classification of the fan community as fanatical does not allow for variation in the intensity of fan experience. This could feel alienating to both casual fans and the visitors whose only impression of the *otaku*-community comes from this exhibition.

The "Otaku"-room manages to create a simulated fan-experience by replicating a con in the exhibition room. However, as the language used in the exhibition room portrays the fan as being fanatical, it focuses on a very limited scope of fandom intensity.

Representing fan-activity

An important aspect of the fan community is their productive activities. It is often alluded to, but outside of the feature of cosplay costumes, is not heavily featured in the exhibition. This section will highlight two areas of production, of which a more well-rounded inclusion would have enriched the exhibition.

The Cosplay-exhibit has a main text narrating the Star Trek origins of the cultural practice,[62] the importance of workmanship in the creation of cosplay and the enjoyment one has in transforming into one's favorite character.[63] Each costume on display is also accompanied with a text conveying the pedigree of the creator and wearer of the exhibited cosplay.[64] These texts emphasize the importance of cosplay championships, but cosplay is not just performed in a competitive arena. As Eron Rauch and Christopher Bolton, a Japan-loving photographer and a scholar of comparative and Japanese literature respectively, write, cosplay is more complex than that. Outside of cosplaying for competitions or cons, cosplayers also like to be photographed. The photos are then the intended product and often involve (quasi-)professional photographers. The pictures are often staged to imitate specific scenes from the anime, manga or game on which the cosplay is based.[65] Cosplay is "… part of a feedback loop that allows fans to enter into a text and transform it, turning the readers into authors and blurring the distinction between fan and critic, as well as reader and text."[66] This particular aspect of cosplay remains unexplored in the exhibition.

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[61] Appendix 3.b., wall text, "Fans and fan clubs."
[62] Star Trek is a popular science fiction television show.
[63] Appendix 2.a., wall text, "Cosplay"
[64] Appendix 3.c.-3.f., object texts, "Ronald Boom as Brother Petros", "Liza Kaper as Caithe", "Sørine Karlsson as Princess Dorothea" and "Alberto de Dios Gonzales as Wild Tiger"
[65] Rauch and Bolton 2010, p. 177.
[66] Ibidem, pp. 176-177.

Another highly interesting aspect of fan activity that is only briefly mentioned is the phenomenon of fansubbing. Fansubbing is the practice in which fans of an anime add their own subtitles and post these on a website for public access. As the main text of the room mentions, translating is an important aspect of fan activity.[67] However, as Ian Condry, a Japanologist, points out, the posting of the translated anime episodes or manga chapters for free on fan-run sites is in direct violation of copyright law. These fansubbers would argue that they contribute to the growth of anime fans, but it is still an illegal practice. Yet, as Condry shows, even within the world of fansubbing certain codes of honor are upheld. Anime that has been licensed in the United States for example is no longer translated, as there is a legal way of consuming that product now.[68] As these practices have contributed to the popularity of anime and manga worldwide, more information regarding this practice would have made a fascinating addition to the exhibition, especially considering the legal and moral conundrums attached to this practice.

The *otaku* as a diverse interpretive community

However, the "Otaku"-room is not the only place in which the global community of *otaku* is addressed. The Introductory room showcases how the interpretive community of fans, colored by regional differences, create similar media of fan expression.

The Introductory room has an exhibit in which several wall texts are positioned around a map of the world. This is the first contact the visitors have with the fan community, in which its practices and experiences are addressed in an overview of short texts describing regional practices. It is in this exhibit that one can also find the one mention of Cool Japan as a government policy.[69] The breadth of fan activity is described in the exhibit. An example of this is how manga has inspired many regional variations, including Dutch "poldermanga", Muslim manga and Korean *manhwa*.[70] It also discusses the spread of cosplay, *kawaii* products and of Lolita street fashion. These particular aspects of the fan culture are explored further in other parts of the exhibition, in the "Otaku"-room and the "Kawaii"-room respectively. This exhibit can serve as an example of how I interpret the Cool Japan fandom as an interpretive community. As Fish theorized, interpretive communities cannot be recognized by regionality or shared cultural background, but by the shared interpretive

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[67] Appendix 3.a., wall text, "Welcome to the world of the devoted fan"
[68] Condry 2010, pp. 194-195.
[69] Appendix 2.a., wall text, "Exporting Cool Japan"
[70] Appendix 3g-3i, wall texts, "Peanut butter and cows: Manga from the Dutch Polder", "Muslim Manga", "Global Manga"

framework in which they process a particular set of data.[71] In this case, the *otaku* are worldwide, yet engage in many of the same cultural practices, be it consuming manga and anime, creating cosplay or writing their own manga.

There are, however, regional and cultural differences that can be observed within the global *otaku* community, which are reflected in the exhibition. For instance, the exhibit shows two pictures of Lolita-clad women, with one woman having added a hijab to her outfit, a display of cultural translation of a shared cultural practice. Another example of the regional differences is that the manga 'ambassador' of Japan is Doraemon, a character mostly unknown in the Americas and Europe, yet vastly popular in (South) East Asia. The consumption of manga may be global, but which anime and manga become popular is more diverse. In her book regarding the spread of Cool Japan fan culture, Anne Cooper-Chen, a mass communications scholar, who has published widely on this subject, argues that the European market can be characterized as generally having interest sparked by anime first, and manga later, having a large, active female fanbase, and having manga be an influence on European comics.[72] The productive side of the *otaku* subculture is an essential part of the fan experience and was highlighted not only in this exhibit, but also in the main text of the "Otaku"-room as well.

Presenting a varied interpretation of Cool Japan

The visitors can be distinguished into roughly two groups of people: the fans of Cool Japan whose images around Japan mostly stem from their consumption of anime and manga, the *otaku,* and the casual consumer of the Cool Japan who may have created their own set of expectations and associations through (pop) cultural osmosis. However, this second group on its own exists of various interpretive communities, that each have their own interpretations of Japanese culture. The exhibition makers aimed to make the exhibition recognizable for a variety of visitor groups and this section will explore to what extent these other groups are represented in the exhibition.

For starters, the many rooms show a vast array of different areas in which certain expectations and images are represented. This structure is a clever way where not every visitor had to find their own vision of Japan in each room, but they should find some exhibits echoing how they interpret Japan. By exhibiting a vast scope and variation this exhibition seems to reflect the many areas in which Japan occupies a dominant or significant cultural role.

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[71] Hooper-Greenhill 2000, pp. 119-120.
[72] Cooper-Chen 2010, p. 120.

The Introductory room opens with an introduction to Cool Japan as a phenomenon. In the middle of the large room is a round display filled with a vast array of iconic characters of Japanese popular culture, such as Hello Kitty and Mario, that seems to be designed to be recognizable to everyone. Furthermore, there is an element of discovery in this display of a large group of characters. Everyone will recognize at least one or more characters and for the more devoted fans, it would almost be a game to recognize the more obscure icons as well. This creates an enjoyable experience for all visitors: from casual consumer of some Japanese fantasy ware to the hardcore collector. Another such display is in the "Warriors"-room, where a wall is covered with drawings of several warriors from Japanese pop culture from varying degrees of obscurity. Napier argues that this directly engages the fan, as it plays into their desire to display subcultural capital. What she means by subcultural capital is a valued display of acquired knowledge that can be used to elevate one's status. She states that having obscure knowledge regarding anime and manga allows for the acquisition and display of subcultural capital in cons, or in this case, in a museum visit.[73] It seems to be an effective strategy to engage the more knowledgeable visitor with the exhibition that is mostly dedicated to a large common denominator.

The exhibition however is not necessarily focused on the associations of the interpretive community of the *otaku*. The "Samurai"-room contains a large exhibit regarding Japanese tattoo traditions, the popularity of which has little to do with these media. In fact, as the exhibit text states, tattoos are in general not considered "cool" in Japan, as they are seen as connected to the Japanese mafia.[74] Japanese tattoos are not shown a lot in anime and manga, instead it is through the Western appreciation and adoption of Japanese tattoo style and imagery that it has spread, and became popular.[75]

One could argue that the "Essence"-room is completely divorced from anime and manga, as this room is dedicated to Japanese design. The room discusses the impact Japanese fashion designers have had on the fashion world and the association between minimalist and Japanese design, despite this not being a solely Japanese aesthetic.[76] It questions the assumption that certain design aspects are typically Japanese, and challenges the audience to reexamine their presuppositions. The exhibit does not explain how this association came to be, but it is intriguing to note that this room was included in this exhibition. It shows that the exhibition makers wanted to include the image of Japan

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[73] Napier 2007, p. 151.
[74] Appendix 3.j., wall text, "Cool or uncool: tattoos"
[75] Idem.
[76] Appendix 3.k., wall text, "Essence in fashion and design: Is there such a thing as 'typically Japanese'?"

for all fans, including those belonging to an interpretive community that associate Japan more with its high culture than its low culture. The makers decided to show many different images of Japan and question their basis in reality. Furthermore, by including both the Tattoo-exhibit whose popularity mostly exists in the West and the "Essence"-room that directly questions a specific association, the Cool Japan exhibition tries to recontextualize the imagery held by the visitors.

Conclusion

The Cool Japan exhibition featured a wide array of interpretations of Japan. The *otaku* were heavily featured in their own room that mimicked a con. Their internal variety in terms of regional differences and their shared practices were highlighted, although the varying intensity of fandom was not. Other interpretive communities, who associate Cool Japan with other cultural phenomena, like tattoos or fashion, were also included. This chapter showed how the exhibition engaged with a multitude of voices.

Outside of all the current modes of fan culture, the "Otaku"-room also highlights the history of Japanese fan culture. This is not the only time that Japanese history is conveyed in the exhibition. The next chapter shall explore in depth when and how history is used. As history can be interpreted in many different ways, it will be interesting to see when which history is presented in the exhibition.

Chapter 4: Cool Japan and representing history

Introduction

The exhibition is built around images the expected visitor groups were thought to have had regarding Japan. By introducing a historical context, these expectations are supposed to be challenges and nuanced. This is why history plays an integral part of the exhibition. It can be found on every level of the exhibition, from individual object texts to larger wall texts. This chapter shall focus on the portrayal and application of history in the exhibition rooms and critically revisit which history is shown. It will also question if the applied historical narratives had challenged or nuanced the images that are presented in the exhibition.

Manga: a locus of contested history

The "The Line"-room plays an interesting role in the exhibition. It shows the development of Japanese drawing tradition that can be linked to specific elements in manga. It is a room that is mostly dedicated to historical objects, such as woodblock prints, drawings and sketches. As such, historical narratives play a key role in the room. The exhibition engages with a fierce debate regarding the historical development of manga. This chapter will analyze the exhibition's position in this debate and how this position is articulated in the presented objects and narratives.

The "The Line"-room in the exhibition is dedicated to manga and Japanese drawing traditions. The room is divided into two halves, a front area and a back area. The front area is divided in the middle by a folding screen-like display with objects hanging on both sides. The back area of the room is dedicated to a film about the aspects of the Japanese drawing tradition, a display case with objects that can be considered as significant influences on manga, and another film showing several *mangaka* (manga artists) and their process.

As stated before, this room takes a position in one of the fiercest debates regarding manga, which is regarding its origin and development. Rebecca Suter, a comparative and Japanese literature scholar, typifies this debate as existing out of two camps. First, there is a group of scholars that deny or minimize the influence of Western comics to legitimize manga as an entirely Japanese medium. They would argue that modern manga is a direct descendent of the "Animals"-scroll from the Heian period (794-1185), a satirical painting scroll depicting animals acting like humans, the *Manga* of Hokusai Katsushika (1760-1849), which are a series of impromptu humorous or satirical sketches,

and *ukiyo-e* with satirical contents.[77] According to these scholars, manga and these historic modes of visual storytelling share commonalities in their incorporation of text and image, movement lines that creates dynamism, and their frequent use of humor and satire. Suter writes that the "Cool Japan" campaigns of the Japanese government were happy to capitalize on this myth of manga being the purely Japanese descendent of Heian and Tokugawa traditions.[78] As we have learned from Choo, manga has been deemed part of Japanese traditional culture by the Japanese government.[79]

This historicizing of manga is, however, contested by a second group that identifies the development of manga as being the product of Western influences during the nineteenth century. They consider the historicizing tendencies of the first school to be an essentialist view of manga. They argue that manga has transcultural roots, being descendants from satirical comic strips by foreign journalists, such as Charles Wirgman (1832-1891) and Georges Bigot (1860-1927) in the second half of the nineteenth century. They also point to the adoption of Euro-American newspaper format of including short comic panels. The comic panel is a significant structural characteristic of manga, and differs greatly from the visual structure of picture scrolls. Furthermore, because of these, comics were consumed that differs from past forms of Japanese graphic narration.[80] One could argue however, that manga did not develop in a cultural vacuum, in which the Japanese creators only consumed Western comics. In fact, they were raised in a culture with strong visual narrative traditions, and a certain level of influence can be assumed to have occurred.

This is argued by the third school, that Suter does not portray. It places manga somewhere in the middle, and considers the medium taking elements of traditions of Japanese visual storytelling, but recognizes the significant influence of the West. Kinko Ito and Toni Johnson-Woods for example recognize in various scopes the influence that the long tradition of graphic narration has had on manga, whilst pointing to the essential influence Western comic tradition has had. Ito, a sociologist who specializes in Japanese pop culture, starts the timeline of manga development all the way back to the caricatures found on the backs of planks of the Horyuji temple from the eighth

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[77] *Ukiyo-e* meaning images of the floating world, this genre of woodblock print from the Tokugawa period (1600-1867) was dedicated to images from the pleasure quarters in Japanese society and showed images of beautiful women or courtesans, kabuki plays and actors, and more.
Suter 2016, p. 178.
"Manga," http://www.aisf.or.jp/~jaanus/ (March 3, 2018)
[78] Suter 2016, p. 178
[79] Choo 2018, pp. 5.
[80] Suter 2016, pp. 178-179

century.[81] She cites multiple spiritual predecessors of manga, including *kibyōshi*.[82] She goes on however to recognize the influence of Wirgman and Bigot and the influence of Western style newspaper comics.[83] Johnson-Woods, attached to the School of Communication and Arts at the University of Queensland, Australia, focuses on the themes that were taken from previous incarnation of Japanese graphic narration. She makes a difference between formal analysis of manga development, which is focused on specific elements of manga such as the use of text balloons and panels, and historical development, that is focused on modes of consumption and use of similar themes, in which the history of manga goes all the way back to the "Animal"-scrolls of the twelfth century.[84] The exhibition adheres to this third school of thought, although the influence of Western comic traditions is less pronounced.

The main text of The Line brings to the attention of the reader the similarities of manga and the drawings of the "old masters", yet makes clear that without the influence of Western comic strips manga could not have developed as it has.[85] The theme texts and object texts of the exhibition asserts that similarities between old masters and manga are frequently made. However, this is often accompanied with the reassertion that this may be a coincidence and/or that Western influences are not to be forgotten.[86] An interesting point that the exhibition makes about manga is

Figure 4.1ab. Anonymous, *Earthquake print*, 1855-1856.

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[81] Ito 2015, p. 458.
[82] *Kibyōshi* is a type of picture book with a mixture of text and image popular during the Tokugawa period (1600-1867).
[83] Ito 2015, pp. 458-460.
[84] Johnson-Woods 2005, pp. 19-23.
[85] Appendix 4.a., wall text, "1000 years of craftmanship: From old masters to modern mass production."
[86] Appendix 4.b.-4.d., wall texts, "Outline", "Layout and visualization" and "Rapid lines, dynamic poses"

its incorporation of movement lines in manga. They state that this may be similar to the movement lines observed in earlier drawings. This point was also made by the first school of manga history. Yet what sets the point of the exhibition apart is the included nuance, which states that they are not the speed lines that manga uses now. [87]

Another important point is the exhibition's discussion around text balloons. The first school would argue that text cones, which can be seen in the Earthquake print (see figure 4.1.) shown in the exhibition, are predecessors of the text balloons in manga. These text cones resemble text balloons to a certain extent. Yet, as the object text asks, "Are these really text balloons?" [88] This question shows that the exhibition questions the first school's attempt to historicize aspects of manga. The discussion around the introduction of text balloons in manga is closed in another object text, "Japan Punch," which announces that this publication created by Charles Wirgman introduced the text balloon to Japan.[89] Again, by delegating these points to object texts, the visitors may just see the text cones in the Earthquake print and conclude that text balloons have a long Japanese legacy.

Vogel taught us that the display of objects could infer relationships and impressions that distort the identity of an object.[90] The use of object texts undercuts any implied causal relationship between the two, but the display of old drawings side by side with pages from manga and animation cells of anime would visually link the two. This demands the reading of the object texts in order for this message to be consumed and processed. The exhibition would have belonged more clearly to the third, if they had placed more emphasis on the Western elements that influenced manga and anime. The discussion surrounding text balloon for instance requires the reading of object texts as well. Another example of valuable information delegated to object texts is the influence of Disney on the art of Osamu Tezuka (1928-1989), who was a very influential *mangaka*.[91]

However, this does not mean that all Western influence was ignored. One theme of the "The Line"-room was the adoption of Western rules of perspective in Japanese art.[92] This is more likely to have been processed by the visitors, but is not an example that underpins the status of manga as a cultural hybrid. It can be considered to be a more general example of how Japanese art was open to foreign influences, which was an important point to emphasize nonetheless.

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[87] Appendix 4.d., wall text, "Rapid lines, dynamic poses"
[88] Appendix 4.e., object text, "Earthquake print"
[89] Appendix 4.f., object text, "Japan Punch"
[90] Vogel 1991, pp. 195-198
[91] Appendix 4.g., object text, "Filmic montage"
[92] Appendix 4.h., wall text, "Japanese versus Western perspective"

This room had to position itself in a complex debate and did this with moderate success. The influence of both Japanese drawing traditions and Western modes of comics and drawing are recognized. Yet, important points of debates are delegated to the object texts and the influence of the West could have been articulated in more detail.

The samurai: a figure of myth and history

The "Warriors"-room is dedicated to the role of the samurai in Japanese and Western imagination, in which specific aspects of the figure regarding its iconography and mythical qualities are highlighted. This room could have benefited from more historical contextualization, as the complex histories regarding the samurai as a cultural and sociological figure are underrecognized.

The size of the "Warriors"-room attests to the large and important position samurai have in the imagination of the expected visiting public. The room is positioned around a suit of armor and two wooden *katana*.[93] From the ceiling a banner with a koi-carp is suspended (see figure 4.2.). On the walls, one can find several aspects of the samurai mythos, like exhibits about samurai as the ultimate warrior, tattoos, and female warriors.

Figure 4.2. The "Warriors"-room

There are many myths surrounding the samurai, as the wall text points out.[94] The exhibition however is lenient when it comes to addressing these myths, despite their assertion that they would provide cultural and historical contexts to the visitors. A myth with which the exhibition seems to break, is the strong association of the samurai with swords by pointing in an object text to the fact that, despite its massive representation in media, in battle samurai preferred to use the bow and

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[93] *Katana* are a type of Japanese swords.
[94] Appendix 4.i., wall text, "Samurai, ninjas and magical girls: Fascination with mythical fighters"

arrow instead of the sword.[95] However, this piece of information was put in an object text, whilst the question of how to recognize a samurai was broadcasted loud and clear in a series of interactives, where visitors had to answer questions. The answer, by his sword, was however not formalized until the Tokugawa period (1600-1867), when the samurai had lost their primary function as a warrior. This raises the question whether the nuance in the object text will be remembered.

As I pointed out in a paper I wrote for an seminar at Leiden University, the samurai were at a time a historical caste in Japanese society, and it was a position that could not be fulfilled by every person with a sword.[96] The samurai have existed since the Heian-period (794-1185), when samurai clans were formed. The Minamoto and the Taira-clan for instance, would battle for supremacy, which led to the military rule of the Kamakura shogunate in the twelfth century, which was followed by many other samurai rulers throughout Japan's history, and one of Japan's most famous works of literature: the *Heike monogatari* (1240), which described this battle.[97] Throughout their thousand years of existence, samurai have played an integral role in Japanese history, something to which the wall texts briefly alludes.[98]

Another myth that remains intact is the samurai's code of honor, or as the main text of the Tattoo-exhibit states: "the way of the samurai". As Michelle Mason, professor at the department of East Asian Languages and Cultures at the University of Maryland, would argue, this code of ethics was written down in 1900, in a book written by Inazo Nitobe, titled *Bushidō: the spirit of the samurai.* *Bushidō,* which directly translates to the "way of the warrior", refers to a set of moral rules by which samurai had to abide. Nitobe was an important author, educator, politician and diplomat during the Meiji-period (1868-1912).[99] This book was published after the dissolvement of the samurai-class. Before that, according to Mason, this word had not been used nor had a comprehensive guide to samurai ethics of this size been published, despite centuries of samurai rule.[100] However, as Paul Varley, professor Japanese Cultural History at the University of Hawaii, points out, in the seventeenth century, a famed scholar named Yamaga Sokō (1622-1585) originated the concept of *bushidō* in an attempt justify the samurai class, now that they only functioned as bureaucrats or stipendiaries. His concept of the samurai was that they functioned as a moral guidepost for the rest of Japanese society. Their supposed unrelenting loyalty and strong sense for duty resembles with the

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[95] Appendix 4.j., object text, "Samurai armor and weapon"
[96] W. Rijnbergen, "Lost Curation: Dispelling the myths of "typically Japanese" in the Cool Japan exhibition"
[97] Varley 2000, pp. 79-80.
[98] Appendix 4.k., wall text, "Samurai, the ultimate warrior"
[99] Mason 2011, p. 69.
[100] Ibidem, pp. 69–71.

associations currently held regarding samurai.[101] However, this concept of the samurai only came to be formalized after the samurai had lost their primary function as a warrior. As such, conflating this code of honor as being an inherent characteristic for thousand years of samurai history is historically inaccurate. Neither author mentions the other scholar, but whether or not Sokō was a direct influence on Nitobe, the fact remains that the vision of the samurai currently dominant is an invented tradition. Especially Nitobe's book was very influential, both for the Japanese and for foreigners, for whom the book was written.[102] The exhibition refers thrice to this invented tradition, once as a point of attraction of the samurai as a warrior with a strict moral code, a reason for the samurai to be considered the ultimate warrior, and once as related to the practice of tattoos.[103] I would argue that to include this in their narratives without commenting on its historical context only reinforces the invented tradition.

The exhibition would have benefited from a more circumspect selection of narratives. The exhibition seemed to have taken as their main narrative in this room the role samurai have played in popular culture and the imagination, both in Japan as in the West. However, as the exhibition makers form the very inception of the exhibition stated that they would be providing context in order to broaden the understanding of the visitors, they should have made more room for the history of the samurai, both as a figure of historical importance and as an object of invented traditions.

Another important example of how a lack of historical context can undermine a broader understanding of certain aspects of Cool Japan, in this case the samurai, is the Tattoo-exhibit. It explains the lack of positive views regarding tattoos in Japan. It makes clear that the attraction of Japanese tattoos in the West is because of their beauty and their association with 'the way of the samurai'.[104] However, samurai and tattoos are not connected in the way this room implies. The wearing of tattoos was a complex practice during the Tokugawa period, when figural tattoos were developed, as W.R van Gulik, Japanese and Korean art historian and former head of the Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden, explained. Masterless, or unemployed samurai, who were called *rōnin*, sometimes banded together to create gangs. Tattoos were often given as a punishment and these bandits tattooed over them to mask their past crimes. At the same time, groups of the townspeople,

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[101] Varley 2000, pp. 207-208.
[102] Mason 2011, p. 71.
[103] Appendix 4.i., wall text, "Samurai, ninjas and magical girls: Fascination with mythical fighters", appendix 4.l., "Samurai, the ultimate warrior" and appendix 3.l., wall text "Cool or uncool: tattoos"
[104] Idem.

that consisted of the artisan and trader castes, styled themselves after the anti-heroes of *Suikoden* and tattooed their bodies, [105] while defending townsfolk against cruel samurai. Lawful samurai, however, did not wear tattoos. [106] The Tattoo-exhibit continued with a display of objects painted with popular tattoo-themes, of which the meaning is conveyed in object texts. The inclusion of many *Suikoden*-prints seems mostly included for their aesthetic appeal, as their influence on the large size of most Japanese tattoos remains unexplored.[107] In the end, the samurai and tattoos have no dominant connection between them. The combination of the emphasis on samurai in the "Warriors"-room and the inclusion of the Tattoo-exhibit implies a linage that does not exist historically. Without the added context, this connection would only be enhanced by this coupling.

The inclusion of an exhibit dedicated to female warriors in Japanese history and current popular culture undercuts the assumption that warriors are always male.[108] The inclusion of so-called "magical girls", like the example of Sailor Moon, further highlights that female warriors can be powerful without having to diminish their femininity. This brings about a more nuanced definition of the warrior. The presentation of Sailor moon-related commercial products as if these are historical or art objects underpins the importance of this inclusion in this exhibition room.

The "Warriors"-room is a problematic room in terms of historical context. The chosen narratives of the samurai as ultimate, loyal warriors, and inspiration of Western and Japanese media undercuts the potential that this room had to contextualize the samurai. The samurai were more than just an object of fascination, but a sociological class of great historical importance. The inclusion of female warriors may provide some nuance, but the prevalence of the Tattoo-exhibit infers a connection that is not historically sound. In the end, the Samurai-room does not live up to the promise of context that drives this exhibition.

Kawaii: universal appeal and specific style

The "Kawaii"-room also incorporates history. However, this history is mostly based around a universal preference for little animals, which does not do justice the actual history of Japanese *kawaii*-culture or its scope. Furthermore, it undersells how important the development of the concept and style of *shōjo* was in Japanese society.

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[105] Translated as "The Watermargin", it was a popular series of stories surrounding Chinese tattooed anti-heroes.
[106] Van Gulik 1982, pp. 53-57.
[107] Ibidem, pp. 52-53.
[108] Appendix 4.m., wall text "Female warriors", appendix 4.n., object text "The fifteen best known female warriors", and appendix 4.o., object text "Sailor Moon: the Might of the Moon Mist"

The "Kawaii"-room includes a small exhibit regarding the predecessors to the current cute culture of Japan. Their narratives regarding the history of *kawaii* can be split into two sections: first, the universal appeal of cute animals that is present in art from the Tokugawa-period onwards, and second, a narrative regarding a specific development of a *kawaii*-style in Japan.[109] The first narrative discusses different art objects displaying small or cute animals. The purpose of this narrative, in my eyes, is to bring the Japanese *kawaii*-culture closer to home by pointing at this universal appeal. The overtly pink room and the displayed objects and merchandise can come across as too much or even alienating. This narrative grounds the *kawaii*-culture in something more generally appealing. The object texts included with this exhibits show the prevalence of cute animals in Japanese art.[110] Important to note is also the visual appeal of the exhibited objects, which could be an additional reason to showcase them.

As the wall text explains, these images show that cute culture is not a recent phenomenon. However, the *kawaii*-culture did not naturally progress out of a universal preference for small animals and babies, nor can it be defined by such limited parameters of cute-ness. As the main text of the "Kawaii"-room already states, *kawaii*-culture developed out of a protest of young girls who did not want to grow up due to societal pressures and tough working conditions.[111] This history would have been a more appropriate starting point of *kawaii*, as this is the concrete start of Japanese *kawaii*-culture as we know it today.

The other half of the text is dedicated to the development of the *shōjo*-style,[112] which depicted females with large eyes, childlike proportions and fashionable outfits. The explanation is rather short and this element is only accompanied by two objects and object texts. One showing a print of Matsumoto Katsuji (1904-1986), who created the first *kawaii* icon, "Kurumi-chan", and another showing a drawing Takahashi Macoto (1934-), who it is said that he introduced the large eyes that are now considered to be typical for manga and anime.[113] These two texts provide historical antecedents for *kawaii* culture of today, although the connections are left for the visitor to be made. This is a pity, because the history of the development of the style is complex and goes beyond the simple depiction of women in cute clothes and with big eyes. In fact, as Mizuki Takahashi writes in his chapter in *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime* (2008)*, shōjo* is a

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[109] Appendix 4.p., wall text "Forerunners of kawaii"
[110] Appendix 4.q., object text "Model of a puppy"
[111] Appendix 4.r., wall text, "Kawaii means cute – or does it?"
[112] *Shōjo* meaning young girl, is also the name of the genre of manga for young girls.
[113] Appendix 4.s., object text "Kurumi-chan Circus", appendix 4.t., object text "Petit la (Spanish volume)'

construction deeply embedded in Japanese gender politics, and the development of the *shōjo* style was just as much a creation of a behavioral type as well as a visual one.[114] By not going deeper into the history of this style or *kawaii*-culture in general, the exhibition ignores the historical complexities inherent to a culture, which not only promotes a certain type of look but also a certain type of behavior. The history of the *kawaii*-wall text thus presents only a limited look into the start of *kawaii*-culture and its subsequent development and impact.

Conclusion

In the exhibition, historical context was applied with varying degrees of success. The "The Line"-room positioned itself in a complex historical debate, although it needed more emphasis on Western influence. The Samurai-exhibits were not nuanced to the point that their place in Japanese history would be understood. The Kawaii-room showed a preference of visual impact above objects with more fitting historical development. In the end, the historical context was lacking with nuance either being left out or delegated to object texts.

Through the chapters, it is clear that the exhibition may be directed at the global fascination with Japan, but that does not mean that Japanese voices are not represented in the exhibits. The next chapter shall discuss the presence of Japanese voices included in the exhibition and critically review how their Japan is represented and how it relates to the Cool Japan imagery held by the rest of the world.

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[114] Takahashi 2008, pp. 115-119.

Chapter 5: Cool Japan in the eyes of the Japanese

Introduction

Until now, Cool Japan has been discussed largely on the basis of non-Japanese fascination with Japanese visual culture. However, Cool Japan does not function solely in the collective consciousness of the rest of the world, but is experienced and commented on within Japan as well. The exhibition has understood this as well, by allowing for Japanese artists, designers and creators otherwise, to be included in the exhibition. This chapter also analyze the inclusion of Japanese creators that showcase the scope of Japanese experience within the Cool Japan, from celebratory to critical. It shall visit the instances that Japanese artistic and cultural practices have been represented without the applied global lens that has been dominant in the exhibition. It will question why the exhibition makers had chosen these particular voices to be heard in the exhibition and what in my opinion their inclusion contributes to their respective rooms.

Art reflections

The exhibition did not only include objects from pop culture or history, but art as well. This section will analyze how the artists commented on Cool Japan as a phenomenon. Furthermore, it will question what these art works add to the image of Japan that is created in their respective rooms and why these particular objects were chosen. It will analyze the art works by Yoshitomo Nara (1959-), Hiroyuki Matsuura (1964-), the artist collective Three and Makoto Aida (1965-).

Aspects of Cool Japan, such as the rising popularity of manga and anime and the proliferation of *kawaii*-culture are observed, experienced and sometimes criticized by Japanese creators. One art school that is currently very focused on Cool Japan, is the so-called Superflat movement created by Takashi Murakami (1962-). As Cindy Lisica, an American art historian, states, Superflat takes its inspiration from manga and anime, but mixes this with techniques from the Tokugawa period. Murakami aims to merge fine arts and commercial culture.[115] The term Superflat has a double meaning, as it both invokes the flatness of the art in terms of its flat dimensions and missing perspective, and the flatness they observe in Japanese consumer society.[116]

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[115] Lisica 2010, p. 1
[116] Ibidem, p. 6.

Often grouped together with Murakami is Yoshitomo Nara, a famous pop artist from Japan. However, as Magrit Brehm wrote it in her 2002 publication *The Japanese Experience-Inevitable*, Murakami and Nara belong to different schools within the New Pop genre, which comments on the excessive consumerism that creates "… a value vacuum behind a beautiful façade."[117] Nara is differentiated from Murakami by his roots in punk and street art, whilst Murakami is typified by his pop art and his status as the "king of consumerism."[118] Nara's work is included in the exhibition because there are three art works that reflect upon the current *kawaii*-culture. The wall-text of this exhibit tells about this "dark" side of *kawaii*-culture, commenting on the desire to remain a child.[119] Nara's figures are cute, like in "Otafuku II" (see figure 5.1), in which he created a porcelain head of a blank looking girl, and depict young children that have this expression of anger, sadness or melancholy. As the object text states, many of his fans empathize with these figures.[120] "Sleepness night", another work of his, depicting a figurine of a sour looking child in an animal costume, is also a cute character with an angry expression. His art blends high culture with low culture, by creating art works inspired by foreign and Japanese print books.[121] Furthermore, he also creates more commercial objects that can be more readily and widely consumed.[122] According to Sarah Osenton, a scholar specialized in Japanese popular culture, another aspect of Nara's work is that the cuteness of his girls is not one of weakness or of infantilization, but functions as a shield. Often his girls carry weapons, showcasing their strength.[123]

Figure 5.1. Yoshitomo Nara, *Otafuku II*, 2010

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[117] Lisica 2010, p. 31
[118] Idem
[119] Appendix 5.a., wall text, "Kawaii-art: not entirely innocent."
[120] Appendix 5.b., object text, "Otafuku II"
[121] Appendix 5.c., object text, "M.I.A."
[122] Appendix 5.d., object text, "Sleepness Night."
[123] Osenton 2006, pp. 69-70.

Figure 5.2. On the right: Yoshitomo Nara, *M.I.A.*, 1999

Another art work of his, "M.I.A." (see figure 5.2.) is a reflection of the feelings many Japanese "youngsters" had in the 1990s, [124] who feared the future and longed back to their childhood.[125] The Japan of Nara is one in which people have risen up against the *kawaii*-culture and critically reflect the negative emotions that *kawaii*-culture does not allow to be expressed. "M.I.A." goes beyond that and reflects, according to the object text, the fears of a generation about growing up, and their desire to remain a child. *Kawaii*-culture was built on a generation of Japanese young women that protested against their adulthood and the rigid gender roles and function in society that was inherent to growing up.[126] This refusal to grow up still fuels the *kawaii*-culture and the *kawaii*-industry, as one wall text observes.[127] The inclusion of these three works are meant to reflect the growing unease with the widespread *kawaii*-culture. Just as this culture developed out of rebellion, so now do many people, like Nara, rebel as well. It shows that *kawaii*-culture does not exist in a vacuum, nor that it is as innocent as it seems to be.

According to the exhibition website, Hiroyuki Matsuura's work "Uki-uki" (see figure 5.3.) was one of the top pieces in the exhibition.[128] The artwork depicts a pink-haired girl in manga style wearing a traditional Japanese kimono on a folding screen-like frame with gold leaf background. The exhibition makers consider this work as exemplary for the exhibition as it combines Japanese pop

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[124] The title probably refers to the common abbreviation of "Missing in action".
[125] Appendix 5.c., object text, "M.I.A."
[126] https://volkenkunde.nl/nl/pers/kawaii-kunst-schattig-met-een-twist (April 23, 2018)
[127] Appendix 5.e., wall text, "Franchises and merchandise: cashing in"
[128] https://www.volkenkunde.nl/nl/pers/uki-uki-van-matsuura-hiroyuki-topstuk-van-tentoonstelling-cool-japan (April, 13, 2018)

Figure 5.3. Hiroyuki Matsuura, *Uki-uki*, 2012

culture with classic elements. Matsuura creates many paintings with manga-like figures, as he has fully embraced that style as his own. He considers this style a newborn, but standing on the shoulders of Japanese painting tradition and being representative of this age. He creates modern art in this style because he believes that manga will be recognized as high art in "… fifty or a hundred years."[129] To him, the manga-style is not just a low culture object of mass-production, but in fact the future of Japanese modern art and its equal. [130]It lends credibility to a style that is otherwise easily dismissed in terms of artistic merit. Outside of its function as the embodiment of the intentions of the exhibition, this aspect of Matsuura's work would have made a valuable addition to the exhibition narratives.

The third artist that I would like to discuss is the artist collective of Three. Their artwork (see figure 5.4.) consists of various deconstructed female figurines reassembled together into the figure of a girl with a hole in

Figure 5.4. Three, *11.7KG*, 2017

the head. Their placement in the "Otaku"-room is another example of fans of popular culture being inspired by their fandom to create. Three works with plastic figurines depicting manga, anime and game characters that are disassembled and then melted in molds to create a new work. The individual parts are always still recognizable in the final product. The artist group does not consider this an act of destruction, but an act of preservation by creating something new out of recycled parts. Three also comments on Japan itself, noting how the different figurines together form one figure, representing the way individuals lose themselves in the masses in the overcrowded cities of Japan.[131] The artists of Three collect figurines and it is this fandom that moves them to create works that preserve them, rather than hide or disfigure them. By including

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[129] http://hiroyukimatsuura.com/profile/ (April 13, 2018)
[130] Idem.
[131] Appendix 5.f., object text, "11.7KG"

Three in this "Otaku"-room, Japanese *otaku* get a contemporary voice and shows just how much creativity can be born from fandom.

The fourth artist to discuss is Makoto Aida, a famous contemporary artist. His artwork *Harakiri Schoolgirls* was included in the "Monsters"-room, due to its violent and gory imagery. The work, according to the object text, combines two cultural icons: the high school girl and the samurai, showing how several smiling high school girls commit *hara-kiri*.[132] He criticizes on the iconicity of *hara-kiri* that has been glorified in Japanese society.[133] The inclusion of this work goes beyond a display of Japanese gore. As the main text of the room states, Japan is globally known and beloved for their horror by fans. Committing *hara-kiri* is being (pop) culturally glorified, but this work shows how in Japan people have not just noticed the trend, but have also rejected this phenomenon.[134] Aida is showing through his often-shocking work the taboos existing in Japanese society that would otherwise be ignored or left unspoken.[135]

The chosen artworks all contributed to the overall narrative of their respective rooms. These art works were not chosen on visual impact alone, but were probably selected by the exhibition makers with an eye on the constructed narratives in the rooms. Together they create the vast scope of Japanese experience of Cool Japan. Nara and Aida provided much needed countermovement to dominant cultural phenomena, whilst Three and Matsuura each provided a positive embracing of Cool Japan, going so far as to legitimize certain styles and practices with their work. Yet, at the same time, whether or not they consider Cool Japan a positive phenomenon, could the worldwide popularity of their work not be the product of Cool Japan as well? As such, these Japanese artists provided a layering to the exhibition narratives by their inclusion, although the question remains to what extent this was observed by the visitor.

Fashioning cultural identity

The "Essence"-room is dominated by five mannequins showing fashion created or inspired by Japanese designers (see figure 5.5.). The grammar of the room is centered on a central question: When and how does design qualify as "typically Japanese"? This question is posed in the main wall text, wondering why there is this association between minimalist design and Japan.[136] The room

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[132] *Hara-kiri* meaning ritual suicide through the cutting of the abdomen.
[133] Appendix 5.g., object text, "Harikiri Schoolgirls (Seppuku joshikōsei)"
[134] Idem.
[135] https://www.mori.art.museum/english/contents/aidamakoto/artist/index.html (April 14, 2018)
[136] Appendix 5.h., wall text, "Essence in fashion and design: Is there such a thing as typically Japanese?"

shows through their selection of objects that certain objects may seem Japanese, but were produced in other nations.

The text mentions the exhibited fashion and asked why it is that these pieces are instantly recognizable as Japanese. The question remains however, whether these pieces are truly characterized by elements that are inherently Japanese. The exhibited Japanese designers are Issey Miyake, Rei Kawakubo from Comme de Garcons and Yohji Yamamoto. As Bonnie English, Australian art historian, shows in her book *Japanese Fashion Designers: The*

Figure 5.5. Fashion exhibit at the Essence Room

Work and Influence of Issey Miyake, Yohji Yamamoto, and Rei Kawakubo (2011), the cultural identity of these designers is a complex influence on their design process. The wall text cites Japanese tea ceremony as often being used to explain the Japanese preference for minimalism. English too argues that the Japanese aesthetic preferences of simplicity and perishability can be related to this, which can also be seen in the three Japanese designers' work.[137] Throughout her book, English refers to culturally determined aspects of the designers' work, like the influence of the kimono.[138] That being said, the kimono is not an obscure aspect of Japanese culture. The popularity of the kimono in the West goes all the way back to the wave of Japonisme in Europe in the nineteenth century. Would the prominence of the kimono in the work of these designers truly be an expression of their Japanese-ness?

English may focus mostly on the Japanese aspects of the designs in her book, she complicates the matter as well, citing at the same time that two designers, Yohji Yamamoto and Issey Miyake, actively denied any determination of them as "Japanese" designers. Miyake considers his work to transcend nationality.[139] Yamamoto used to take issue with designing something

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[137] Appendix 5.h., wall text, "Essence in fashion and design: Is there such a thing as typically Japanese?"
English 2011, pp. 2-3.
[138] Ibidem, pp. 4-5, 73
[139] Ibidem, p. 17

"Japanese" early in his career.[140] Yamamoto also argues that his clothes do not belong to any nationality or culture.[141] Another important point that is made in her book is a citation from Dorinne Kondo, an American anthropologist. Kondo questions the applicability of terms like culture and nation to the fashion industry as this is inherently trans-national. The three designers work in Paris, and have been surrounded by Western clothes their entire lives. To what extent can one then state that their work is culturally determined?[142] What exemplifies this, is the inclusion of a dress of Ann Demeulemeester in the exhibition, who has been inspired by their work, as this showcases the cross-cultural pathways that are inherent in the fashion and art world.

In a sense, these chosen designers show the complexity of individual creativity on the one hand, and cultural identity on the other. Yamamoto and Miyake struggled with the denomination of being "Japanese". The object texts and wall text about the displayed pieces is mostly descriptive in nature, explaining the characteristics of the fashion of Kawakubo, Miyake and Yamamoto.[143] If their problems with being labeled "Japanese" had been included in the object texts or the wall text, the exhibition would have more clearly underlined its own point about cultural essentialism in design and fashion having to be questioned.

The face of *kawaii* culture

The "Kawaii"-room has been discussed before, but included more than the previously discussed history of *kawaii* and criticism of *kawaii*-culture through art. The room also featured *kawaii* merchandise, a video screen, and a display filled with outfits that belong within the *kawaii*-culture. The exhibition features a video in which a *decora* model and designer (see page 14), Haruka Kurebayashi, talks about her street fashion style and takes the viewers on a shopping tour. As Kurebayashi explains, there is a difference between her clothing style and cosplay, as cosplay has a goal: to look like a character from an anime, game or manga. To her, street fashion does not have a particular goal. It is about expressing your individual style through clothing. Her experience has a humanizing effect on the exhibited outfits. As Baxandall has pointed out, the exhibition room can be seen as a field in which three actors have to interrelate with each other: the maker of the object,

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[140] English 2011, p. 40
[141] Ibidem, p. 46
[142] Ibidem, p. 20.
[143] Appendix 5.h., wall text, "Essence in fashion and design: Is there such a thing as typically Japanese?", appendix 5.i., wall text, "Progressive fashion from Japan"
Appendix 5.j.-5.m., object texts, "Ensemble Comme des Garçons", "Women's sweater Comme des Garçons", "Ladies' ensemble Yohji Yamamoto", "Woman's trouser suit Issey Miyake"

who has the direct and natural understanding of their own culture, the curator who has to represent the culture of the exhibited objects from their own understanding of culture, and the visitor who comes to look at the object and seeks to understand it.[144] By including an interview by the "creator" of the exhibited outfit, the exhibition makers facilitate a direct understanding of the cultural context in which Kurebayashi created this particular outfit. These objects can easily be dismissed as having no particular cultural value or meaning, as they are mass manufactured. However, the inclusion of Kurebayashi reinforces the cultural significance of the clothes, as they are now an expression of the self in a particular subculture. In the video, Kurebayashi explains that she dresses that way, because she likes to look cute, and because it suits her personality. This motivation is easily identifiable for the visiting audience, even if the particular style does not suit their taste. They are able to place a face to a style that is so, almost alienatingly, flamboyant.

Another interesting aspect of this exhibit is the inclusion that Kurebayashi mostly has foreign followers. The wall text already points out how the image building of the rest of the world, projected this association between dominant Japanese styles and *decora*, despite this being a small subculture in Japan. [145] It is an interesting point for the exhibition to make, as this undercuts the expectations of the visitor. As Abel already argued, her way of dressing could be just as exotic and maybe mystifying for the Japanese public as it is for the exhibition visitor.[146] It adds to the exhibition as an example of foreign appreciation for a Japanese cultural practice that is undervalued in Japan itself, just like the Tattoo-exhibit in the "Warriors"-room. It is a strong argument for the central intention of the exhibition of providing context to pre/misconceptions held by the visiting public regarding Japanese visual culture. The exhibition does point out the rebellion that currently reacts against *kawaii*-culture in Japan by including works by artists like Nara, but also provides an example of people who enjoy *kawaii*-culture, such as Kurebayashi. By doing so, they provide a circumspect image of the way *kawaii*-culture is practiced and experienced in Japan. Not only does this exhibit cleverly humanize a style and as an extension the *kawaii*-culture, they underline the misrepresentation of Japan by pointing to the global overvaluation of a small subculture.

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[144] Baxandall, p. 36-37.
[145] Appendix 2.b., wall text, "Cute street fashion"
[146] Abel 2011.

Monsters Inc.

The "Monsters"-room typifies how Japanese traditions are used as inspiration by many different media and for all kinds of popular culture. These media are then also consumed in the West, creating cross-cultural manifestations of Japanese traditions and spreading knowledge of its iconography around the world.

Situated above the "Warriors"-room, the "Monsters"-room wraps around a hole in the middle, where the koi banner of the "Warriors"-room hung. Its main narrative is constructed in a similar way as the "Warriors"-room, pointing to the role of its subject in stories, and their dominant position in popular culture. The difference is however that "monsters" stem from story traditions. Demons, or *yōkai* as they are called, and ghosts solely exist in the collective imagination. The other rooms often challenge preconceptions by providing historical or cultural context, but the "Monsters"-room provides this mostly to broaden already existing knowledge of Japanese horror stories. The room's exhibited objects are mostly historical in nature, showcasing artists' renditions of monsters and ghosts in paintings or manufactured heads and bodies of monsters. As such, this room mainly represents a Japanese cultural practice and as such can be considered as a whole, as its contents having been least mediated by a Western experience or perspective.

An important mode in which the global audience gets familiarized with the exhibited story traditions is through Japanese horror films, which are primarily meant for a Japanese audience. As such, the audience had to interpret cultural practices that have not been altered to make them more accessible to foreigners. The traditional Japanese spirit in white robes and with long black hair became a well-known figure through its popularization in the famous film *Ringu* (1998).[147] This film would later get an American remake titled *The Ring* (2002) although this was not as well-received, getting an average score of 6.6, with *Ringu* getting a 7.6 on movie rating site Rotten Tomatoes.[148]

As I have pointed out previously in my unpublished paper, certain media, such as anime for children do get adapted for international markets.[149] Shows like *Pokémon*, that may have had the designs of the creatures based on *yōkai*, got adapted for foreign markets on a far-reaching scale. Northrop Davis, writer of *Manga and anime go to Hollywood* (2015), defined this process as localization. This is the process in which foreign cultural signifiers get translated to fit local cultures better.[150]

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[147] Appendix 5.n., object text, "Spirit with long hair"
[148] https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/ring (April 16, 2018)
https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/ringu (April 16, 2018
[149] Walijne Rijnbergen, "Lost in Curation: Dispelling the myths of "typically Japanese" in the Cool Japan exhibition"
[150] Davis 2016, p. 13.

Iwabuchi called this process "cultural odorlessness" and stated that is was well-worn tactic during the 1990s.[151] Adapting the series to fit better culturally made this series so popular globally, but also problematizes the extent foreign audiences got familiarized with Japanese ghost story traditions.[152] Another show the exhibition points out is *Yo-kai Watch*, which is inspired more directly by *yōkai* and features them more plainly for foreign audiences.[153] Japanese horror films and shows like *Yo-kai Watch* show how a Japanese cultural phenomenon got commercialized and shared globally, familiarizing the global populace with Japanese story conventions and their pantheon of ghosts and *yōkai*.

Another intriguing example of this dissemination is the work of Tomohiro Hasegawa, a game developer working on the latest installation of the popular game series *Final Fantasy*. He explains that he took direct inspiration from *yōkai*, which he refigured to look like realistic wild animals.[154] The exhibition explains the creative process behind the design of these creatures and the implementation of real fish-anatomy to create his sea dragon.[155] Outside of the visual attractiveness of his designs, this inclusion is based on being exemplary for a large-scale process on the adaptation of traditional Japanese story traditions in modern media, such as video games. This fits with an overarching theme of the room of how modern pop cultural media disseminate Japanese iconography to a global public. Hasegawa designs also return in the "The Line"-room, in which several phases in the design process of a demon was shown. In this instance, the emphasis was on the creativity and work that goes into the design process that depends on the rendering of several anatomic layers like the skeleton, the muscle structure and the skin.[156] Hasegawa thus functions on two levels, both as an example of how story traditions are readapted for a modern and global audience, and as an example of craftmanship and creativity, which is considered by the exhibition as being exemplary of Japanese illustrations.

The stories and monsters may belong to Japanese traditions, but through their adaptations into popular incarnations by creators like Hasegawa, Western audiences get familiarized with their iconography and their stories. The inclusion of this room in the exhibition shows how the

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[151] Iwabuchi 2002, p. 257
[152] Appendix 5.o., wall text, "Yōkai"
[153] Idem.
[154] Appendix 5.p., wall text, "Final Fantasy: game art inspired by yōkai monsters"
[155] Appendix 5.q., object text "Behemoth from Final Fantasy XV" and appendix 5.r., object text, "Leviathan from Final Fantasy XV"
[156] Appendix 5.s., object text, "Mesmenir, from Final Fantasy XV"

fascination with Japanese popular culture is both based on and actively creates knowledge of Japanese cultural practices like ghost stories.

Conclusion

The exhibition cleverly included Japanese voices in the exhibition. With the artists they showed the scope of Japanese reactions regarding aspects of Cool Japan from critical to celebratory. The fashion designers were used to question the association between Japan and minimalist design, but lacked inclusion of their own position regarding their cultural identity. The inclusion of Kurebayashi added a face to *kawaii*-culture and functions as a counterbalance to earlier *kawaii*-criticism. The "Monsters"-room showed how Japanese story traditions can be disseminated globally through tin popular culture. In the end, this chapter showed how the Japanese voices have and could have been used to present a more circumspect image of Cool Japan.

Conclusion

This thesis aimed to answer the question how the Cool Japan exhibition mediated the complex cultural phenomenon of Cool Japan in their exhibits. To answer this question I have analyzed the exhibition as having two levels of meaning making. Firstly, the sensuous aspects of the exhibition, such as objects and their placement, the colors of the various rooms, sound-effects, et cetera, influence the interpretative processes of the visitor, as Vogel showed in her exhibition. The exhibition shows awareness of this process, as they transform the "Otaku"-room in a con to mediate a fan-experience. It however struggled in certain instances to heed the dangers of this practice with certain exhibits as well, like the Tattoo-exhibit. As the approach of the exhibition was from the perspective of perceived cultural connections, certain exhibits had to be placed together. This means for instance that because of the supposed association between samurai and tattoos, they were placed in the same room. This despite the historical reality of these having no direct ties.

It was through the second layer of meaning, existing of wall and object texts that such discrepancies between dominant imagery and actual cultural and historical context were supposed to be resolved. What this thesis found, was that the exhibition struggled with the implementation of context, despite the exhibition makers' assertion that that was their primary goal. Especially their application of history lacked the necessary focus and nuance to properly present a more circumspect image of Japan, like in the Tattoo-exhibit and the History of *kawaii*-exhibit. Furthermore, often nuance or important detail was added in object texts, which are not usually read by every visitor. With the ever-present danger of reasserting previous held preconceptions by the visitors by exhibiting them plainly in the National Museum of Worldcultures, one could say that in that respect the exhibition did not live up to its potential.

One of the strong points of the exhibition however, was in the application of multiple voices in the exhibits. It showcased an internal variety of represented communities. Whether it was in the diversity of the rooms, which focused on multiple interpretations of Japan, or the inclusion of Japanese artists and designers that respond(ed) to Cool Japan, the exhibition was able to mediate many different perspectives. The showcased variety makes the exhibition intriguing in the context of ethnological exhibitions. The layering of multiple voices shows that it is possible to highlight a complex cultural phenomenon without having to gloss over the multitude of related (interpretive) communities. In the case of the Japanese government, the exhibition takes a deliberate step to ensure the audience knows no connection formally exists. Their intention of including cultural

context and nuance would indeed elevate the exhibition from being an unwilling government agent, although the lack of actual nuance could place them into that position anyway.

Cool Japan was a complex topic for the curators to tackle, even more so when they decided to make the fascination with Japanese visual culture their primary approach. In the end, one can conclude that their approach was ambitious. The amount of research done in preparation of the exhibition showed a desire to be culturally circumspect. However, ultimately this potential was lost, as texts got rewritten and shortened, losing nuance in the process. Certain misunderstandings related to exhibited phenomena were not contextualized to the extent that the visitor would walk away with a new understanding. Their focus on exhibiting visually interesting objects instead of objects that make narrational sense is noticeable in for instance the history of *kawaii*-exhibit. In addition, much needed nuance was oftentimes delegated to the object texts. This would mean that for example, instances of the Western influences in manga would be lost in the bombast of the exhibits.

I would argue that the exhibition was able to properly convey the many communities related to the Cool Japan phenomenon, and highlighted that complexity in their exhibits. However, their added context that was supposed to broaden the understanding of the presupposed images surrounding Japan of the visitor was lacking, as much needed nuance and detail got lost. The dangers of exhibiting cultural stereotypes without context is that their feature in an institution as prominent as the National Museum of Worldcultures could further cement their place in the visitors' mind.

With the Cool Japan-exhibition reopening at the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam 2018, the examples set by the exhibition, both good and bad, might inspire a generation of culturally complex and circumspect exhibitions that do not just interest the visitors, but will inspire them to challenge their own preconceptions and create a new understanding of culture.

Appendix

Throughout this thesis, wall texts and object texts have been analyzed by their choice of words and included information. This appendix will contain all the referenced texts ordered by their appearance in their respective chapters.

The texts originated as followed: as an intern working on this exhibition, it was my task to research specific objects and themes. This research was put into texts of about 150 words texts. These were later shortened and partly rewritten by my supervisor, curator Japan and Korea, Daan Kok, with final editing by the exhibition maker, Rik Herder. The curator was responsible for the content, but the exhibition maker was responsible for the final product. Lastly, the Head of Exhibitions, Anne Marie Woerlee, did the final checks.

This rewriting was done in order to create texts in a similar style and tone. Wall texts and object texts had different lengths, with object texts being about 60 words, main wall texts being around 100 words and specific theme wall texts around 75. This process of cutting down the amount of words led to an ongoing battle between style and substance. In the end the text went through at least four people's hands and had to be shortened and simplified, which unfortunately caused nuance and detail to be lost in the process.

Chapter 2

2.a.

De export van Cool Japan

Vanaf de jaren 2000 werd de internationale populariteit van Japanse popcultuur opgemerkt door journalisten en academici, die het de 'gross national cool' doopten. Tegenwoordig wordt hiervoor de term Cool Japan gebruikt.
'Cool Japan' werd officieel in 2012, toen de Japanse overheid de 'Cool Japan Strategie' oprichtte. Het doel was de culturele invloed te vergroten en de economie te stimuleren. Deze tentoonstelling staat los van dit programma.

Exporting Cool Japan

In the 2000s, journalists and academics noted the international popularity of Japanese pop culture and dubbed it Japan's 'gross national cool.' Now, the term 'Cool Japan' describes this global appeal.
'Cool Japan' became official in 2012 when the Japanese government established the Cool Japan Strategy, in order to enhance its cultural influence and stimulate its economy. This exhibition is unrelated to that government-sponsored initiative.

Doraemon, de 'ambassadeur van anime-cultuur'
Doraemon, the 'ambassador of anime culture'

Doraemon als mascotte voor de Olympische spelen van 2020 in Tokyo
Doraemon as mascot for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics

2.b.

Cosplay

Literally getting under the skin of your favourite character: the closest a fan could possibly come to their beloved series or star. Cosplay is about making and wearing the costumes worn by anime and game characters, and it is hugely popular. The word comes from 'costume play', which originated with Star Trek fans in America. Cosplay competitions are held all over the world, including at Animecon in The Hague. The winners go on to the finals on the most important stage of all: Japan.

2.c.

Cute street fashion

The Harajuku district of Tokyo is synonymous with eye-catching street fashion. The styles that come from here are instantly recognisable as Japanese. The 'lolita', for example, in all her guises. The decora style is currently very popular. Featuring lots of small plastic accessories in neon colours, it has spread around the world. Nevertheless, this is a relatively small sub-culture. Look in any metro in Tokyo and you will seldom see anyone wearing such an outfit. When it comes to street fashion, image has triumphed over reality.

Chapter 3

3.a.

Welcome to the world of the devoted fan

Japanese popular culture has many devoted fans, or otaku. People who spend hours gaming, reading and watching, and are fanatical collectors. Many fans not only consume cultural products, however, they also help produce them, subtitling Japanese films, drawing their own manga, and working for months on costumes that resemble their favourite character in every detail.

At first otaku was a term of abuse, but nowadays it is embraced as a nickname, just like 'nerd' and 'geek' in the west. Otaku meet up at conventions, or 'cons'. In this gallery you can try out on a small scale some of the activities available at a con. Go for it – release your inner fan!

3.b.

Fans and fanclubs

It's wonderful to be a fan. Obsessively following your idol, looking forward to their next performance, daydreaming over their picture. Japanese fan culture was already well established in the 18th century. Popular actors from kabuki theatre (which had only male players) were greeted adoringly wherever they went. Fans organised themselves into groups and sponsored their idols with great devotion. More than half of all Japanese prints are related to kabuki theatre.

3.c.

Ronald Boom als Brother Petros

Brother Petros is een karakter uit Trinity Blood, een serie die onder cosplayers geliefd is vanwege de gedetailleerde concept art. Hij is hoofd van de inquisitie in een tweestrijd tussen het Vaticaan en vampieren genaamd Methuselah. De Nederlander Ronald Boom, die optreedt onder de naam Kireus, behaalde met dit kostuum de tweede plaats op de Eurocosplay finale in Londen in 2011. Dit jaar vertegenwoordigt hij samen met Melissa van den Berg (Mirai) Nederland tijdens de belangrijkste cosplay competitie ter wereld, de World Cosplay Summit in Japan.

Ronald Boom as Brother Petros

Brother Petros is a character from Trinity Blood, a series that is very popular with cosplayers because of its detailed concept art. He is the leader of the inquisition in a battle between the Vatican and vampires known as Methuselah. Dutchman Ronald Boom, who performs under the name Kireus, came second in the 2011 Eurocosplay final in London with this costume. This year, he and Melissa van den Berg (Mirai) will represent the Netherlands at the world's most important cosplay competition, the World Cosplay Summit in Japan.

3.d.

Liza Kaper als Caithe

Liza en Sophie vormen samen Team Paraluna en hebben aan veel internationale wedstrijden meegedaan. Ze zijn bekende namen in de cosplay wereld. Afgelopen zomer traden ze op in China tijdens CICAF, een immense beurs waar meer dan een miljoen bezoekers komen.

Tijdens een cosplay optreden voeren de deelnemers een zelfbedachte routine uit, begeleid door filmbeelden en muziek uit de bijbehorende serie. Bovendien worden de kostuums door een jury geïnspecteerd op kwaliteit, detaillering en authenticiteit: het kopen van kant-en-klare kleding is een doodzonde. Dit kostuum is afkomstig uit de online role playing game Guild Wars 2.

Liza Kaper as Caithe

Liza and Sophie – known as Team Paraluna – are well known in the cosplay world, having taken part in many international competitions. Last summer they performed at CICAF in China, a huge convention that attracts more than a million visitors.

During a cosplay event the participants perform their own routine, accompanied by film clips and music from the series. A jury judges the costumes for their quality, detail and authenticity. Wearing an off-the-peg costume is a cardinal sin. This costume is from the role playing game Guild Wars 2.

3.e.

Sørine Karlsson als Prinses Dorothea

De role playing game The Avalon Code werd ontwikkeld voor de Nintendo DS. De Deense cosplayer Sørine Karlsson maakte dit kostuum van de verwende prinses Dorothea. Dorothea blijft niet altijd verwend, maar ontwikkelt een interesse in de mensen om haar heen en gaat de politiek in om een goede prinses te kunnen worden. Sørine was vertegenwoordiger van Denemarken op de World Cosplay Summit in 2011 en geeft tutorials voor beginnende cosplay op haar website.

Sørine Karlsson as Princess Dorothea

The role playing game The Avalon Code was developed for the Nintendo DS. Danish cosplayer Sørine Karlsson made this costume depicting the spoilt Princess Dorothea. The character develops, however, as Dorothea becomes interested in the people around her and goes into politics to do good. Sørine represented Denmark at the World Cosplay Summit in 2011, and gives tutorials for novice cosplayers on her website.

3.f.

Alberto de Dios Gonzales als Wild Tiger

Alberto de Dios Gonzales maakte deze outfit van Wild Tiger, uit de anime serie Tiger and Bunny waarin twee robots de misdaad moeten bestrijden. Alberto vertegenwoordigde Spanje op de World Cosplay Summit in 2012 en is vaak jurylid voor grote wedstrijden zoals de European Cosplay Gathering.

Metaal, plastic, led lampen; gemaakt en gedragen door Dedy (Cos2play); 2012; bruikleen Dedy (Cos2play)

Alberto de Dios Gonzales as Wild Tiger

Alberto de Dios Gonzales made this Wild Tiger outfit. The character is from the anime series Tiger and Bunny, which features two crime-fighting robots. Alberto represented Spain at the World Cosplay Summit in 2012 and often sits on the jury at major competitions like the European Cosplay Gathering.

Metal, plastic, LED bulbs; made and worn by Dedy (Cos2play); 2012; on loan from Dedy (Cos2play)

3.g.

Pindakaas en koeien: manga uit de polder

Wat is nou meer typisch Nederlands dan pindakaas en koeien? De manga Magical Farmgirl Marieke verplaatste het Japanse genre van de magical girl naar de polder. En het boek Pindakaas en sushi begint op een anime-conventie. Robocity speelt zich af in robotland maar werd wel getekend in Nederland.

Peanut butter and cows: manga from the Dutch polder

To the Dutch, nothing says Holland more than peanut butter and cows. The manga Magical Farmgirl Marieke brings the Japanese magical girl genre to the polder. And the story Pindakaas en sushi ('Peanut Butter and Sushi') starts at an anime conference. Robocity is set in robotland, but it was drawn in the Netherlands.

Magical Farmgirl Marieke (1997), Nederland | Netherlands

Marlon Teunissen, Robocity

3.h.

Moslim Manga

Japanse manga en anime zijn populair in het Midden-Oosten en op enkele plekken wordt ook lokaal manga geproduceerd. Het internationale project Moslim Manga wil met het medium een boodschap van vrede verspreiden en bijdragen aan een positief beeld van de islam.
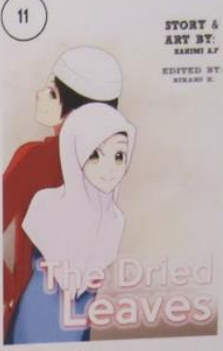
Muslim Manga

Japanese manga and anime are popular in the Middle East and manga is also produced locally in some countries. The international Muslim Manga project aims to use the medium to spread a message of peace and a positive image of Islam.

Gold Ring, 2009, Verenigde Arabische Emiraten | United Arab Emirates

Dried Leaves, 2014, Malaysia

3.i.

Global Manga

Moet manga uit Japan komen om manga te mogen heten? In steeds meer landen, vooral in Azië, worden strips gemaakt die in visuele stijl en type verhalen typisch manga zijn. Manhwa uit Korea en Manhua uit China bijvoorbeeld.

Global Manga

Does manga have to come from Japan to deserve the name? Comic strips that are typically manga in terms of their style and character are being produced in more and more countries, particularly in Asia. They include Manhwa from Korea and Manhua from China.

The Breaker, 2007, Zuid Korea | South Korea

The One, 2005, China

3.j.

Cool or uncool: tattoos

Tattoos, or irezumi, have a long history in Japan, though they have never actually been widely regarded as cool. The visual quality of Japanese tattoos is admired all over the world, and people associate the images with 'the way of the samurai'. In Japan itself, however, people tend to associate tattoos with organised crime. Public bath houses often have signs barring people with tattoos. Japanese tattoos are therefore an example of the worldwide fascination with something that Japan itself is less keen to promote.

Essence in fashion and design
Is there such a thing as
'typically Japanese'?

Simplicity, perfection, purity, essence: many people associate these things with Japan and Japanese design and fashion. The zen garden and the tea ceremony are frequently cited as examples. But is there really such a thing as 'typically Japanese' design? And is it really so minimalist? The rest of this exhibition reveals that Japan also produces loud, complex designs.

Several examples of Japanese fashion and design are on display in this gallery. They include revolutionary haute couture that explores the essence of the garment. And minimalist product design that prompts us to wonder why it is instantly recognisable as 'typically Japanese'.

Chapter 4

4.a.

1000 years of craftsmanship
From old masters to modern
mass production

The similarities between the old masters and modern illustrators are striking. But are those old prints and scroll paintings really the direct forerunners of manga and anime? The answer is: no, not really, because American comics and cartoons were also a major source of inspiration for early manga and anime.

However, it is an indisputable fact that many techniques and visual tricks that have been used for centuries are still used by modern mangaka (illustrators) and animators. In this sense, today's craftsmen and -women are standing on the shoulders of giants.

4.b.

Outline

With their clear outlines, Japanese drawings and prints are instantly recognisable. This can be seen throughout the history of Japanese illustration, from the first millennium to the present day, particularly in woodcuts. Of course it is also a key feature of manga and anime, though the same can be said of comic strips all over the world.

4.c.

Layout and visualisation

How to divide up an empty page – where to position the image, and the text, and what to leave empty? Illustrators can choose from endless possibilities and variations when it comes to visualisation, layout and the positioning of speech and thoughts.

Japan has a long tradition of visual narrative, in which a complete story is depicted on the page. Text and image have also long been combined in Japanese art. Nevertheless, modern manga would not have come about had it not been for Western influences.

4.d.

Rapid lines, dynamic poses

One of the key features of anime and manga is the speed and dynamism reflected in the drawing style, particularly in the action genres. This dynamism can also be seen in books and prints from the 19th century. They may not feature the 'speed lines' of modern comic strips, but there are some striking similarities. Snapshots of objects flying through the image, for example, and poses with curved lines that suggest a character in motion. Another visual trick that has been used for a long time is depicting a moment just before or just after an action or movement.

4.e.

Aardbevingsprent

Na de grote aardbeving van 1855 werden allerlei prenten uitgegeven waar een meerval in voorkwam. Een enorm exemplaar van deze vis onder de grond van Japan zou aardbevingen veroorzaken.

Een van de grote discussiepunten in studies naar manga is wanneer de tekstballon geïntroduceerd werd. Ze lijken wel voor te komen in boeken en prenten van de laat-18e en eerste helft 19e eeuw. De ambachtslieden en aannemers in deze prent spreken hun dank uit aan de meerval dat hij ze veel reconstructiewerk gegeven heeft. Maar tekstballon?

Kleurenhoutsnede, diptiek; ontwerper onbekend; 1855-1856; RV-1353-2237a & a1

Earthquake print

After the major earthquake of 1855 all kinds of prints were published featuring catfish, referencing the belief that a huge catfish beneath the earth caused earthquakes in Japan.

One of the major points of contention in studies of manga is when speech bubbles were first introduced. They seem to occur in books and prints from the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The craftsmen and builders in this print are thanking the catfish for giving them lots of reconstruction work. But are these really speech bubbles?

Colour woodcut, diptych; designer unknown; 1855-1856; RV-1353-2237a & a1

4.f.

Japan Punch

Nadat Japan zich vanaf 1854 onder dwang van Amerika openstelde voor internationale handel kwam snel een instroom van buitenlandse invloed op gang. De Engelse illustrator Charles Wirgman (1832-1891) bracht het eerste (maandelijkse) tijdschrift uit: Japan Punch. Hij tekende zelf de cartoons, waarin hij ook gebruik maakte van tekstballonnen. Algemeen wordt aangenomen dat dit de origine is van de tekstballon, naar hedendaagse maatstaven, in Japan.

Tijdschrift, houtsnede; Charles Wirgman; 1875/6; TM-749-18

Japan Punch

After America coerced Japan into opening its borders to international trade in 1854, it was soon exposed to a deluge of foreign influences. British illustrator Charles Wirgman (1832-1891) published the first monthly magazine: Japan Punch. He drew cartoons for the magazine himself, also using speech bubbles. It is generally assumed that this is the origin of the speech bubble as used in Japan today.

Magazine, woodblock printed; Charles Wirgman; 1875/6; TM-749-18

4.g.

Filmische montage

Hij wordt niet voor niets de 'God van de Manga' genoemd: Tezuka Osamu (1928-1989). Zijn productie en werkdrift waren ongeëvenaard en zijn invloed niet te onderschatten. Tezuka, een groot bewonderaar van Disney, gaf manga onder meer een dynamische, haast filmische vlakverdeling, waarin hij totalen (overzichten) afwisselde met close-ups (details). Dit gaf de manga vleugels. Hier een voorbeeld uit zijn debuut, New Treasure Island (1947).

New Treasure Island, Tezuka Osamu (reproductie)

Filmic montage

Tezuka Osamu (1928-1989) is known as the 'God of Manga', and not without reason. His drive and productivity were unparalleled and his influence cannot be overstated. Tezuka, a great admirer of Disney, brought to manga a dynamic, almost filmic, compositional style that alternates overviews with close-ups, giving the genre a huge boost. This example is from his debut work, New Treasure Island (1947).

New Treasure Island, Tezuka Osamu (reproduction)

4.h.

Japanese versus Western perspective

The use of perspective in Japanese illustrations is a good example of styles imported from other countries. European illustrated books were hugely popular in Japan in the 18th and 19th centuries. The technique of linear perspective with a central vanishing point was new in Japan, but Japanese artists successfully adopted it. Positioning larger objects in the foreground also allowed Japanese illustrators to enhance the depth of their compositions.

4.i.

Samurai, ninjas and magical girls
Fascination with mythical fighters

What is it that fascinates people about Japanese warriors? Is it the samurai's sense of honour? The ninja's almost superhuman skills? The deadly weapons they wield? Or the dark tales with their shades of grey, where there is no clear line between right and wrong?

Japanese culture has a long tradition of heroic tales full of action and adventure. From the tales depicted on classical screens to the latest video games, the fight is often the focus. Samurai have inspired legions of storytellers, allowing popular culture to further add to the mythical status of these fearless warriors. And it is precisely this mythical element that fascinates people most.

4.j.

Wapenrusting van een samoerai

Op het slagveld zijn de pijl en boog de voornaamste wapens, omdat daarmee op afstand geschoten kan worden. Toch spreekt een zwaardvechtende Japanse krijger meer tot de verbeelding. In Japanse cinema maar ook in Hollywood is dit de iconische verschijning. Nóg fascinerender: de met twee zwaarden tegelijk vechtende Miyamoto Musashi (ca. 1584-1645). Deze wapenrusting, van iets na zijn tijd, is opgesteld in een pose met twee houten oefenzwaarden. Zo werd hij vaak afgebeeld in illustraties.

Metaal, leer, lakwerk, textiel; gesigneerd Sono Yoshikatsu (geen jaartallen bekend); ca. 1700; RV-2843-1

Samurai armour and weapons

Bows and arrows were the main weapons used on the field of battle, as they had a long range. However, a Japanese swordfighter has greater appeal, and this has become the iconic form both in Japanese cinema and in Hollywood. Even more fascinating is Miyamoto Musashi (c. 1584-1645), who fought with two swords at once. This suit of armour, which dates from a little after his time, is displayed with two wooden practice swords. He was often shown like this in illustrations.

Metal, leather, lacquer, textile; signed Sono Yoshikatsu (dates unknown); c. 1700; RV-2843-1

4.k.

Samurai, the ultimate warrior

The samurai is an international icon. These Japanese warriors are the epitome of skill and superior weaponry, absolute devotion to the cause and loyalty to their master. Yet it was in fact disloyal samurai who precipitated some of the great turning points in Japanese history. What is more, a sword cannot compete with a gun.

Despite this reality, however, the samurai is still a major source of inspiration for games, films and manga. Darth Vader of Star Wars, for example – perhaps the most iconic bad guy in cinema history – is based on the samurai: just look at the shape of his helmet. And what is the ultimate weapon of many a sophisticated robot from manga and anime? That's right – the good old sword.

4.l.

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4.m.

Female warriors

Japanese history and literature are full of female warriors who fight for their ideals, their lovers and their family. The most famous female samurai is without doubt Tomoe Gozen (1157?-1247), who followed her master and lover to the battlefield, becoming one of his most important commanders.

Japanese popular culture also features lots of fighting women. These heroines are the main characters in various manga and anime, including Cardcaptor Sakura and Madoka Magica, popular series in the 'magical girls' (mahō shōjo) genre. But don't be fooled by their girlish appearance: they may look endearing, but they are as strong as steel.

4.n.

De vijftien bekendste vrouwelijke strijders

Het drieluik 'Overzicht van heldinnen van het oude Japan', Yamato yūfu kagami, is een voorbeeld van hoe vrouwelijke krijgers geëerd werden. Elk paneel toont vijf historische heldinnen. Geheel rechts bovenaan staat bijvoorbeeld de legendarische samoerai Tomoe Gozen. Zij volgde haar geliefde het strijdveld op en bewees zichzelf als een samoerai die 'wel duizend mannen waard was'.

Houtsnede door Utagawa Kunisada (1786-1865); ca. 1840; RV-1353-1543-abc

The fifteen best known female warriors

The triptych 'Heroines of Old Japan', Yamato yūfu kagami, illustrates how revered women warriors were. Each panel shows five historic heroines. In the top right, for example, we see the legendary samurai Tomoe Gozen, who followed her lover into battle and proved herself to be a samurai 'worth a thousand men'.

Woodcut by Utagawa Kunisada (1786-1865); c. 1840; RV-1353-1543-abc

4.o.

Sailor Moon: the Might of the Moon Mist

One of the most popular warriors in Japan is a schoolgirl with superpowers known as Sailor Moon. In her free time she and her friends protect the world from evil. Sailor Moon is a true phenomenon in Japan, where pretty much every conceivable product is available featuring the image of the blond girl and her companions. She also enjoys international fame. In the 1990s the English translation of the manga and anime allowed her to break through in the United States, following in the footsteps of the international pioneer series Rose of Versailles, which became the first commercially translated manga in the 1980s.

4.p.

Forerunners of kawaii

The human brain is programmed to find certain things cute and appealing. Most of us get a warm, happy feeling when we see a human baby or a baby animal. Paintings of puppies and kittens were already being produced in the Edo period (1600-1868). The images clearly show that cuteness is not merely a contemporary phenomenon.

During the 20th century a typical way of depicting girls developed. Known as shojō, it focused more and more on appealing outfits, childlike proportions and large eyes.

4.q.

Model van een hondje

Deze hondjes hebben wel wat weg van de knuffels van nu. De precieze functie ervan weten we niet, maar elk van de beestjes heeft een sjaal om, wat bijdraagt aan de aaibaarheidsfactor. Ook het feit dat het hier om jonge hondjes gaat, doet vermoeden dat ze bedoeld waren om een reactie van tederheid te ontlokken. Drie verschillende verzamelaars kochten aan het begin van de 19e eeuw in Japan van deze modelhondjes; kennelijk waren ze algemeen verkrijgbaar.

Papier, haar; anoniem; ca. 1820; RV-360-2646; RV-360-3542; RV-360-3555

Model of a puppy

These puppies bear some resemblance to today's cuddly toys. We do not know their exact purpose, though each of them wears a scarf, which makes them all the more appealing. The fact that they are puppies also suggests they were intended to elicit feelings of tenderness. Three different collectors bought examples of these objects in Japan in the early 18th century, so they seem to have been widely available.

Paper, hair; anonymous; c. 1820; RV-360-2646; RV-360-2642; RV-360-3555

4.r.

Kawaii means cute – or does it?

Comical fantasy creatures from Nintendo games, girls with huge eyes: 'cute' or kawaii is one of the most characteristic features of Japanese popular culture. But kawaii means more than just 'cute'. It also denotes immaturity, helplessness and a gentle nature.

The kawaii culture arose as a protest among girls rebelling against the pressure to grow up, work hard and conform to the strict demands of society. Later, the popularity of kawaii brought it great commercial success. Kawaii icons like Hello Kitty gross huge profits in Japan and the rest of the world.

4.s.

Kurumi-chan Circus

Matsumoto Katsuji wordt gezien als de pionier van shōjo manga, strips voor een lezerspubliek van meisjes. Hij creëerde eind jaren 1940 het eerste kawaii icoon: Kurumi-chan. Zij is een vrolijk vijfjarig kind in de hoofdrol van de gelijknamige strip die uitgevoerd is in zoete kleuren. Met blosjes op haar wangetjes en kinderlijke lichaamsverhoudingen is zij zonder meer een schattige verschijning.

Facsimile ('Genga Dash') van handgetekende illustratie door © Matsumoto Katsuji (1904-1986); oorspronkelijk 1953; bruikleen Kyoto Seika University International Manga Research Center

Kurumi-chan Circus

Matsumoto Katsuji is regarded as the pioneer of shōjo manga, comics made specially for girls. In the late 1940s he created the first kawaii icon, Kurumi-chan, a cheery five-year-old who stars in the candy-coloured comic strip of the same name. With her rosy cheeks and childlike posture, she certainly looks endearing.

Facsimile ('Genga Dash') of hand-drawn illustration by © Matsumoto Katsuji (1907-1986); original 1953; on loan from the Kyoto Seika University International Manga Research Center

4.t.

Petit la (Spanish volume)

De dromerige meisjes in het werk van Takahashi Macoto worden aangewezen als startpunt van het tekenen van grote ogen in manga. De dromerigheid in de ogen die Takahashi tekent, zit hem in de glinsterende sterren in de pupillen. Veel meisjes kijken de lezer als het ware aan en brengen op die manier hun emoties over.

Facsimile ('Genga Dash') van handgetekende illustratie door © Takahashi Macoto (1934-); oorspronkelijk 1961; bruikleen Kyoto Seika University International Manga Research Center

Petit la (Spanish volume)

The girls in the work of Takahashi Macoto are regarded as the first manifestation of the large eyes typical of manga. The dreamy look in the eyes drawn by Takahashi is achieved with the glittering stars in the pupils. Many of the girls seem to look at the reader, directly expressing their emotions to them.

Facsimile ('Genga Dash') of hand-drawn illustration by © Takahashi Macoto (b. 1934); original 1961; on loan from the Kyoto Seika University International

Chapter 5

5.a.

Kawaii art: not entirely innocent

Though the focus on kawaii grew out of a protest against the pressures of Japanese society, the culture of cuteness is itself the subject of protest these days. Contemporary Japanese artists grew up surrounded by an excess of kawaii, so the fact that they use the same drawing style need come as no surprise. However, their subjects explore deeper issues such as the individual longing to return to childhood, and the sexualisation that is a common feature of kawaii products.

5.b.

Otafuku II

Nara Yoshitomo is een van de bekendste kunstenaars van Japan. In zijn werk komen veel kinderen voor die op het eerste gezicht schattig lijken. Maar als je beter kijkt, zie je ergens een gemene blik, onderhuidse boosheid, of treurnis. Door die tegenstelling overschrijden de figuren de grenzen tussen kind-zijn en volwassenheid. Nara heeft gemerkt dat veel van zijn fans zichzelf identificeren met de beelden van kinderen en hier hun eigen verhalen omheen bedenken. Otafuku is de altijd vrolijke vrouw uit volksverhalen, en kijkt dus meestal opgewekter.

Keramiek; Nara Yoshitomo (1959-); 2010; privé bruikleengever

Otafuku II

Nara Yoshitomo is one of Japan's best-known artists. His work often features children who appear endearing at first glance. If you look closer, however, you might spot a mean look, repressed anger or a melancholy expression. This contrast blurs the boundary between the childlike and the mature. Nara has noticed that many of his fans identify with the images of children and make up their own stories for them. Otafuku is a symbol of mirth in folklore, who often appears more cheerful.

Ceramic; Nara Yoshitomo (b. 1959); 2010; private lender

5.c.

M.I.A. (Missing in Action)

Hoewel Nara zelf zegt beïnvloed te zijn door muziek en prentenboeken uit zowel Japan als uit het buitenland, doen zijn lijnvoering en kenmerken zoals grote ogen denken aan een manga-tekenstijl. De kalme kleuren en de niet-schattige emoties staan echter vrij ver van de iconen van de kawaii cultuur. Volgens kunsthistorici geeft Nara een symbolische presentatie van gevoelens van de Japanse jeugd in de jaren 1990. Zij stonden onzeker tegenover de toekomst en verlangden terug naar hun 'innerlijke kind'.

Schildering op glasvezel; Nara Yoshitomo (1959-); 1999; privé bruikleengever

M.I.A. (Missing in Action)

Although Nara says he is influenced by music and print books from Japan and other countries, his linework and features, such as large eyes, reference the manga style. However, the muted colours and unappealing emotions could not be more different from the icons of kawaii culture. According to art historians, Nara presents a symbolic representation of the feelings of Japanese youngsters in the 1990s, when they faced an uncertain future and longed to re-establish contact with their 'inner child'.

Painting on fiberglass; Nara Yoshitomo (b. 1959); 1999; private lender

5.d.

Sleepless Night

Nara wordt gerekend tot de Japanse popartiesten en heeft als zodanig een grote schare fans. Die fan-community wordt gevoed met merchandise variërend van sleutelhangers tot knuffels. De fans geven ook terug: Nara heeft bijvoorbeeld werken gemaakt met knuffels die door zijn fans ingezonden werden. Hij brengt ook kunstwerken in beperkte oplage uit, zoals Sleepless Night. Het figuurtje is het soort karakter waar Nara om bekend staat: een lief kindje, maar in dit geval wel chagrijnig door slapeloosheid.

Epoxy; Nara Yoshitomo (1959-); 2007; privé bruikleengever

Sleepless Night

Nara is regarded as a pop artist and as such he has a large fan base. This fan community is served by a whole range of merchandise, from key rings to cuddly toys. His fans also give something back. Nara has for example produced art using cuddly toys sent to him by fans. He also produces limited edition art works, such as Sleepless Night. This is the type of character for which Nara is best known: a sweet child, but in this case rendered bad-tempered through lack of sleep.

Epoxy; Nara Yoshitomo (b. 1959); 2007; private lender

5.e.

Franchises and merchandise: cashing in

Kawaii is big business. Popular manga become anime, and then feature films, TV specials and games: franchising is huge in Japan. Then there is the merchandise, in every imaginable form, from cuddly toys and collectable figures to hairdryers and lampshades, all featuring your favourite characters. Special editions and unique collaborations push sales figures up even further. Adults are prepared to pay large sums to buy something that reminds them of their childhood (or makes them feel like a child).

5.f.

11.7KG

Het kunstenaarscollectief three uit Fukushima maakt sculpturen uit PVC figuren. Hun werk is voortgekomen uit hun eigen fandom. Vanuit ladingen verouderde figuurtjes - waaronder voor dit specifieke beeld ook Europese figuurtjes - stellen ze nieuwe, zelf ontworpen figuren samen. Door het eindproduct deels open te zagen tonen ze hoe binnenin een massa ontstaan is uit het samengesmolten 'vlees' van de figuurtjes. Hiermee verwijzen ze onder andere naar de mensenmassa's in Japanse steden, waar individuele karakters opgelost lijken te worden in een groter geheel. Toch zijn ze, als fans, niet uit op het vernietigen van de merchandise figuren: "in onze optiek leven de karakters hoe dan ook voort, in al hun verschijningen in manga, anime, en als 3D-figuren overal ter wereld."

Sculptuur door kunstenaarscollectief three, Japan, speciaal gecreëerd voor de tentoonstelling Cool Japan; 2017; PVC; bruikleen van de kunstenaars

11.7KG

Inspired by their own fandom, artist collective three, of Fukushima, makes sculptures from PVC figures. They use old figures - in this specific case including European figures - to make new figures of their own design. The open sections cut in the final product reveal the internal mass comprising the melted 'flesh' of the tiny figures, in a reference to the masses of people who populate Japan's cities, where individual personalities appear to dissolve into a greater whole. Nevertheless, as fans themselves, their intention is not to destroy the merchandise figures. "To us, the characters live on, in all their different forms, in manga, anime and as 3D figures all over the world."

Sculpture by artist collective three, Japan, specially created for exhibition Cool Japan; 2017; PVC; loan courtesy of the artists

5.g.

Harikiri Schoolgirls (Seppuku joshikōsei)

In this piece Aida combines two icons of Japanese culture: the classical samurai and the contemporary schoolgirl in uniform. The swords reference ritual suicide by samurai, which is glorified as a cultural phenomenon. Aida is criticising this stereotypical image and, as he himself explains, is attempting to prompt a complex reaction in his audience.

Aida Makoto (b. 1965); print on transparent film, acrylic; 2007; on loan from The Takahashi Collection, courtesy Mizuma Art Gallery

5.h.

Essence in fashion and design
Is there such a thing as
'typically Japanese'?

Simplicity, perfection, purity, essence: many people associate these things with Japan and Japanese design and fashion. The zen garden and the tea ceremony are frequently cited as examples. But is there really such a thing as 'typically Japanese' design? And is it really so minimalist? The rest of this exhibition reveals that Japan also produces loud, complex designs.

Several examples of Japanese fashion and design are on display in this gallery. They include revolutionary haute couture that explores the essence of the garment. And minimalist product design that prompts us to wonder why it is instantly recognisable as 'typically Japanese'.

5.i.

Progressive fashion from Japan

Three progressive Japanese designers unleashed a revolution on the catwalks of Paris in the early 1980s. Kawakubo Rei (of Comme des Garçons), Yohji Yamamoto and Issey Miyake have had a lasting impact on the fashion world. They sought to take clothes back to their essence by using muted colours and removing all embellishments. The clothes designed by the Japanese avant-garde were often unisex and hid the contours of the body. They were also typically made of fairly coarse fabrics, had little detailing and were frequently asymmetrical. The work of Kawakubo, Yamamoto and Miyake also inspired a young generation of designers outside Japan, including Ann Demeulemeester.

5.j.

Ensemble Comme des Garçons

In de mode van de Kawakubo Rei wordt vaak de aandacht gevestigd op de constructie van het kledingstuk. Elementen die anders onzichtbaar blijven zoals naden, rijgsteken, voeringen of verstevigingen, worden hier juist expres zichtbaar gelaten. In dit ensemble van Comme des Garçons is de constructie duidelijk zichtbaar, zij het op een onverwachte manier.

Kawakubo Rei; wol, rayon, polyester; 1998-1999;
in bruikleen van het Centraal Museum, Utrecht

Ensemble Comme des Garçons

Kawakubo Rei's designs often focus on the construction of the garment. Elements that would normally remain invisible, like seams, tacking stitches, linings and stiffening are deliberately left exposed. The structure of this ensemble by Comme des Garçons has been left clearly visible, albeit in an unexpected way.

Kawakubo Rei; wool, rayon, polyester; 1998-1999;
on loan from Centraal Museum, Utrecht

5.k.

Damestrui Comme des Garçons

Kawakubo Rei is oprichter van het modehuis Comme des Garçons, wat Frans is voor: 'zoals jongens'. Haar werk is vaak sekseneutraal en de vrouwenkleding daarom niet getailleerd maar volumineus en oversized. Kenmerkend voor haar werk is eveneens het gebruik van stoffen met een grove textuur zoals ook in deze trui die een open en gevlochten structuur heeft.

Kawakubo Rei; wol; ca. 1985; in bruikleen van het Centraal Museum, Utrecht

Women's sweater Comme des Garçons

Kawakubo Rei is the founder of fashion label Comme des Garçons, French for 'like boys'. Her work is often gender-neutral and her women's clothes are baggy and oversized, rather than tailored. Another key feature of her work is the coarse fabrics she uses, as in this sweater, which has an open, woven texture.

Kawakubo Rei; wool; c. 1985; on loan from Centraal Museum, Utrecht

Comme des Garçons fashion show, herfst-winter 1983-1984, Parijs. Foto: Paul van Riel

5.l.

Damesensemble Yohji Yamamoto

Yohji Yamamoto werkt vaak met voornamelijk zwarte stoffen en heeft veel aandacht voor vakmanschap en detail. Hij wil menselijke mode maken die daarom juist niet perfect moet zijn, dat is de mens immers ook niet. Zijn ontwerpen zijn daarom vaak asymmetrisch maar nooit uit balans.

Yohji Yamamoto; wol; 1990; in bruikleen van het Centraal Museum, Utrecht

Ladies' ensemble Yohji Yamamoto

Yohji Yamamoto often works in black, and has a great eye for craftsmanship and detail. His goal is to produce human fashion that is not necessarily perfect, as people themselves are not perfect. His designs are therefore asymmetrical, though never out of balance.

Yohji Yamamoto; wool; 1990; on loan from Centraal Museum, Utrecht

Yohji Yamamoto fashion show, lente-zomer 1983, Parijs. Foto: Paul van Riel

5.m.

Broekpak voor vrouw Issey Miyake

Dit broekpak is onderdeel van de 'Pleats Please' serie die Issey Miyake vanaf 1988 ontwierp. Hij combineerde met dit ontwerp zijn liefde voor vernieuwende materialen en zijn bewondering voor sekseneutrale kledingstukken zoals de spijkerbroek en het T-shirt. Zulke kledingstukken zijn makkelijk in gebruik, net als de plisséstof die Miyake liet ontwikkelen. De stof valt soepel, is snel droog en kreukt niet.

Issey Miyake; polyester; 1989; bruikleen Gemeentemuseum Den Haag

Woman's trouser suit Issey Miyake

This trouser suit is part of the 'Pleats Please' series that Issey Miyake (Miyake is the surname) launched in 1988. In this design, he combines his passion for innovative materials with his love of gender-neutral clothing like jeans and T-shirts. Garments like this are easy to wear, as is the pleated fabric Miyake had developed. The fabric drapes softly, dries quickly and does not crease.

Issey Miyake; polyester; 1989; on loan from Gemeentemuseum Den Haag

Issey Miyake fashion show, 1989-1990, Parijs. Foto: Paul van Riel

5.n.

Het spook met het lange haar

Wat is enger dan een geest die uit een afbeelding je huiskamer binnenkomt? Als je goed kijkt, zie je dat dit een schildering is ván een schildering waar een geest uit treedt. Deze visuele truc zie je terug in horrorfilm The Ring, waar een geest uit een televisietoestel kruipt. Het witte grafgewaad en de lange onverzorgde haren zijn nog steeds herkenbare elementen van Japanse geesten.

Schildering op zijde door Kawanabe Kyōsai (1831-1898); 1883; RV-4135-3

Spirit with long hair

What could be more terrifying than a spirit that steps out of a picture and into the room? If you look closely, you will see that this is a painting of a painting from which a spirit is emerging. This visual trick is also employed in the horror film The Ring, in which a spirit crawls out of a television set. The white shroud and the long, unkempt hair are highly recognisable features of Japanese spirits.

Silk painting by Kawanabe Kyōsai (1831-1898); 1883; RV-4135-3

5.o.

Yōkai

The variety and creativity of Japanese monsters – yōkai – seems to be endless. They can be terrifying, but they can also be endearing and funny. Admittedly, however, you would not want to meet most of them down a dark alley. Japan's long tradition of tales featuring monsters continues in today's popular culture. Some of the monsters in Pokémon (short for Pocket Monsters) and the game Yo-kai Watch are for example based on popular monsters whose stories have been told for centuries. These days, ancient Japanese monster tales enjoy global popularity.

5.p.

Final Fantasy: game art inspired by yōkai monsters

For ten years, hundreds of people worked on Final Fantasy XV, which was finally released in late 2016. Final Fantasy is a long-running series of Japanese role-playing games ('JRPG') which combine action, mysticism and science with dazzling visuals.

Monster designer Hasegawa Tomohiro told us that he was inspired by the history of yōkai. 'In FF XV the monster characters are not symbolically rendered, they are redefined as apparently realistic wild animals.'

5.q.

Behemoth, uit Final Fantasy XV

De artwork voor de meeste games is 'born-digital'. Maar voor het creëren van levensechte, geloofwaardige monsters gaat er soms niet boven het werken met tastbare, fysieke modellen. Deze foto's tonen het oorspronkelijke kleimodel van de mythische Behemoth, dat later met een 3D-scanner omgezet werd in een digitaal ontwerp.

Hasegawa Tomohiro; foto van kleimodel; 2016; met dank aan © 2016 SQUARE ENIX CO., LTD. All Rights Reserved

Behemoth from Final Fantasy XV

The artwork for most games is 'born-digital', but nothing beats working with tangible physical models when it comes to creating lifelike, believable monsters,. These photos show the original clay model of the mythical Behemoth, which was later converted to a digital design using a 3D scanner.

Hasegawa Tomohiro; photo of clay model; 2016; courtesy © 2016 SQUARE ENIX CO., LTD. All Rights Reserved.

5.r.

Leviathan, uit Final Fantasy XV

Het karakter Leviathan is een indrukwekkende verschijning: een enorme, goddelijke waterdraak. Zijn wapen is de verwoestende tsunami. Over het creëren van de vorm vertelde ontwerper Hasegawa Tomohiro ons: "Om dit monster levensecht te laten overkomen, moest ik diverse elementen van vissen bij elkaar voegen en herstructureren om de waterdraak te ontwerpen".

Hasegawa Tomohiro; digitale schets; 2016; met dank aan © 2016 SQUARE ENIX CO., LTD. All Rights Reserved

Leviathan from Final Fantasy XV

The character Leviathan is an impressive figure: a huge, godlike water dragon. His weapon is the devastating tsunami. Designer Hasegawa Tomohiro told us about the design process. 'To make this monster appear lifelike, I had to combine and restructure various features of fis to design a water dragon.'

Hasegawa Tomohiro; digital sketch; 2016; courtesy of © 2016 SQUARE ENIX CO., LTD. All Rights Reserved.

5.s.

Mesmenir, uit Final Fantasy XV

Final Fantasy is een grote role-playing game vol mythische monsters en gedetailleerde landschappen. Mesmenir is een vijand die moeilijk te verslaan is omdat hij zeer snel rent. De ontwerper van de monster-karakters in het recent verschenen Final Fantasy XV, Hasegawa Tomohiro, werkte enthousiast mee aan deze tentoonstelling. Dit zijn verschillende fasen van een ontwerp, te beginnen bij het skelet en eindigend bij de huid. Het talent en vakmanschap van Hasegawa is onmiskenbaar.

Digitale schetsen en uiteindelijke rendering door Hasegawa Tomohiro; 2016; met dank aan © 2016 SQUARE ENIX CO., LTD. All Rights Reserved.

Mesmenir, from Final Fantasy XV

Final Fantasy is a role-playing game full of mythical monsters and detailed landscapes. Mesmenir is an enemy whose speed makes him difficult to defeat. The designer of the monster characters in the recently released Final Fantasy XV, Hasegawa Tomohiro, kindly collaborated on this exhibition. Here we see the various phases of design, starting with the skeleton and ending with the skin. Hasegawa's talent and craftsmanship are unmistakable.

Digital sketches and final rendering by Hasegawa Tomohiro; 2016; courtesy of © 2016 SQUARE ENIX CO., LTD. All Rights Reserved.

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