

# Between Two Worlds:

## *Folk Culture, Identity, and the American Art of Yasuo Kuniyoshi*

GAIL LEVIN

For Mutsuko Hoshino and Ritsuko T. Ozawa

The Japanese-born painter Yasuo Kuniyoshi's work exemplifies cultural hybridity and cross-fertilization, and the issue of his two cultures has preoccupied critics from the moment he caught public attention. In 1922, the year of his first solo show at the Daniel Gallery in New York, the painter's American patron Hamilton Easter Field wrote, "Yasuo Kuniyoshi . . . has expressed the ideal of modern Japan and of modern America as he has read them fused together in his own heart. He has used an alien technique as if it were his own language."<sup>1</sup> That same year William Murrell, writing in the first monograph on Kuniyoshi, ventured a related judgment: "Yasuo Kuniyoshi is perhaps the only Japanese now painting in America whose work is free from both Oriental and Occidental academic influences as such, . . . the single instance of a selective blending of dynamic elements from two great traditions into a style distinctly original."<sup>2</sup>

By the time of Kuniyoshi's second show at the Daniel Gallery only a year later, a critic noted, "His training and outlook seem to have been entirely Occidental and at first view of his work there no trace of the Orient appears, no semblance of racial attitude towards art. But later one finds the East as well as the West. . . . In his black and white work, the Oriental peeps out further in exquisite abstract forms, where there is surprisingly the most meticulous interest in detail."<sup>3</sup>

Stylistic fusion in Kuniyoshi's work also figured in Lloyd Goodrich's 1948 catalogue essay for the painter's Whitney Museum show, the first solo exhibition at the museum; and the subject features in important recent studies of Kuniyoshi by Tom Wolf and Jane Myers.<sup>4</sup> Turning from style per se, my own research has revealed that Kuniyoshi depicted certain objects and themes that prove, on closer examination, to be typical of the culture a Japanese boy would have absorbed while growing up and which therefore must come from the stack of "past memories" that, according to Kuniyoshi, exercised such a powerful and longstanding influence on his work.<sup>5</sup>

Alexandra Munroe has written: "Critics who wrote

about Kuniyoshi's art commonly felt the need to link elements of his painting style to vague and unfounded notions of traditional Japanese aesthetics. Even Lloyd Goodrich could not resist: 'The artist's concern with all forms of life, down to the most minute—snakes and birds, flowers and weeds—recalls traditional Japanese art.'<sup>6</sup> She insists that "contrary to what has been written, he did not paint the attributes of an exotic cultural heritage. He painted his personal reality, which he saw as a paradox."<sup>7</sup>

Yet Munroe's analysis, like those of the several other writers I have mentioned, does not acknowledge the way that the culturally rich, autobiographical content of Kuniyoshi's work reflects the hybrid that he wrought from two cultures. References to Japanese culture often co-exist in his work with his references to American culture, for Kuniyoshi was truly torn between two worlds. To fully understand Kuniyoshi and his work, we must heed his own words and search out the "memories of the past" about which he himself alerted us so often in writings, speeches, and interviews.

Born in Okayama, Japan, in 1889, Kuniyoshi, at the age of sixteen in 1906, emigrated by himself to the United States. He returned to Japan only once, in 1931, for fewer than four months. The occasion for Kuniyoshi's trip was the arrival of an urgent summons for him to return home to see his ailing father. While Kuniyoshi was in Japan from October 1931 to February 1932 he also had an exhibition of his paintings and lithographs that opened in Tokyo and then traveled to Osaka, as well as a second show of his lithographs in his hometown of Okayama.

Kuniyoshi wrote from Japan to Carl Zigrosser, his friend at the Weyhe Gallery in New York, telling him that he had spent the first month there preparing for his show, but now he hoped to enjoy himself. He reported that he had "seen many paintings and met many important persons, and traveled lot." As happy as he was to have returned to his home, he expressed powerful ambivalence. "Of course I was glad to see my



Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *Japanese Toy Tiger and Odd Objects*, 1932. The Fukutake Collection, Okayama, Japan.

family and they too and I am glad I came to Japan and saw what [it was] all about but after all I don't belong here and I am returning to America as soon as I can make it."<sup>8</sup>

More than a decade later, Kuniyoshi told a journalist that during the trip to Japan he "really felt foreign." He recalled with anguish, "My art was condemned as being too European. I was told I was a barbarian and had lost respect for my people. I was criticized for not observing the elaborate Japanese formality and etiquette of dealing with people."<sup>9</sup> He went on to explain, "I got into the most trouble with the policemen . . . I went up to an officer on a corner one day to ask where a certain street was. Instead of answering, he gave me a terrible bawling out. It seems I should have taken off my hat and stood with head bowed in humility when addressing a member of the government. Now who would do that to a New York cop?"<sup>10</sup>

By the time Kuniyoshi returned to his birthplace, he had spent more than half of his life in the United States. His memories of childhood and youth in Japan must have collided with shifts toward modernization that had taken place since his departure in 1906. Among the many changes Kuniyoshi witnessed was the displacement of handmade crafts by machine-made goods, for example the supplanting of folk toys by machine-made ones. As new modes of rapid trans-

portation became available, there was an accompanying loss of regional distinctions.<sup>11</sup>

During his visit Kuniyoshi acquired several papier-mâché toy tigers with bobbing heads and detachable tails. Not long after his return to the United States, he featured one of the tigers in a still-life painting, *Japanese Toy Tiger and Odd Objects* (1932). Katherine Schmidt, his first wife, from whom he would soon be divorced, also painted a picture that included not one, but two, of the tigers he brought home. Called *Tiger, Tiger*, her canvas does not match the complex cultural resonance of Kuniyoshi's picture *Japanese Toy Tiger and Odd Objects*.

Only eight years after Kuniyoshi's trip home, the Japanese Government Railways published a book about Japanese folk toys, and it lamented their decline in a way that may explain their attraction to Kuniyoshi: "The fundamental cause of the decline of folk-toys as well as of many other worthy traditions of our country is the source of what causes us the greatest concern today. We feel that the upholding of racial consciousness provides the only solution to this problem, even though we may not live to see any striking evidence of the success of this solution."<sup>12</sup>

Of a type known as "*Kurashiki hariko*," the toy tigers collected and painted by Kuniyoshi came from the town called Kurashiki, located just a few miles from his

birthplace in Okayama prefecture. Kurashiki means “warehouse village” and reflects the ancient town’s commercial history; many of its old rice granaries still survive with their distinctive black stone tiles and wood-beamed interiors. It was there that Kuniyoshi could have found in 1931 a bit of old Japan, allowing him to rediscover the ambiance he remembered from his life before 1906.

Kuniyoshi’s nostalgia for his childhood, his nation, and his region coincided with the deep respect for folk art that the art critic and collector Hamilton Easter Field had encouraged in his followers. Until his death in 1922, Field remained close to Kuniyoshi, who lived in one of several houses that Field owned in Brooklyn, New York, and spent his summers with Field in Ogunquit, Maine. The two had met at the historic first exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists in New York in spring 1917, at which time Field became Kuniyoshi’s first important patron. Impressed by his two paintings in this vast artist-organized, non-juried show, Field, who at the time collected modern art, American folk art, and Japanese woodblock prints, began to support Kuniyoshi.<sup>13</sup> Although Field had even collected work by Picasso, he understood “that the American nation is eminently conservative” and declared “American art must be built on other foundations than those of Cubism or Futurism.”<sup>14</sup> Kuniyoshi must have been aware of Field’s belief that “[Americans] should not allow [them]selves to be drawn away from the task . . . of creating a national tradition.”<sup>15</sup>

Kuniyoshi, like several other artists in Field’s circle, caught the fever for collecting American folk art in Maine. Field’s interest in both American folk art and Japanese woodblock prints may well have prompted Kuniyoshi to recall the folk art and culture of his native land.<sup>16</sup> Kuniyoshi must also have known Marsden Hartley’s paintings on the back of glass, inspired by folk art he had seen in both Germany and Maine, ten of which were exhibited at Field’s school in the summer of 1917.<sup>17</sup> Kuniyoshi himself later tried the technique.

Kuniyoshi’s interest in American folk art, so typical of his circle, had progressed so far by 1924 that he was able to lend two pieces from his own collection, a folk painting of a locomotive by W. L. Breese and a cow carved from wood, to an exhibition of early American vernacular work at the Whitney Studio Club in New York in February 1924.<sup>18</sup> His loans showed how profoundly Kuniyoshi had been assimilated into his new cultural environment, since the show featured works of folk art from collections assembled by other contemporary artists and was selected and arranged by the artist Henry Schnakenberg for Juliana Force, the club’s director.

Kuniyoshi’s enthusiasm for collecting American folk art was described by a newspaper reporter in 1924: “I heard that most of the summer colony in Maine last year went mad on the subject of American primitives,

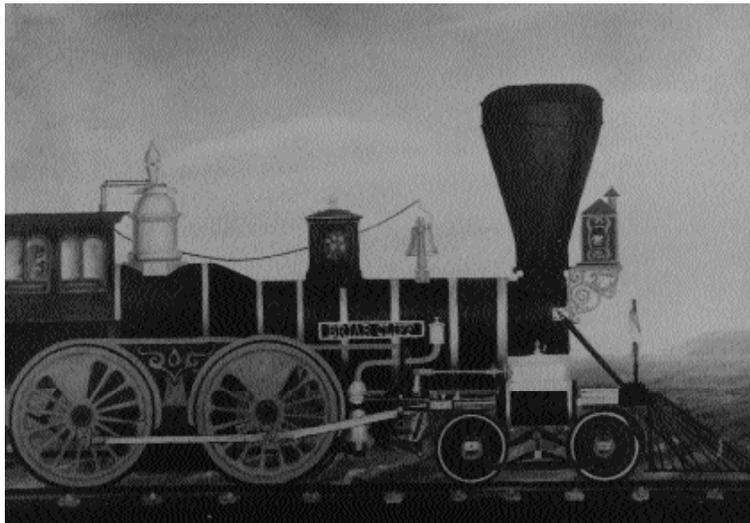
and that Robert Laurent, Dot Varian, Adelaide Lawson, and the Kuniyoshis stripped all the cupboards bare of primitives in the Maine Antique shops.”<sup>19</sup> Another report appeared some twenty years later describing the results of Kuniyoshi’s collecting: “His work has been greatly influenced by his study of early American furniture and dishware, with which his home in Woodstock, N.Y., is furnished.”<sup>20</sup> A fellow artist recalled hearing about a collecting “trip that [Bernard] Karfiol, Laurent, and Kuniyoshi took to a Quaker village. They claimed to have been gone for two or three days, spent approximately twenty-seven dollars between them, and had to hire a truck to bring back their early American treasures.”<sup>21</sup>

Two years after the Whitney Studio Club show, the émigré sculptor Elie Nadelman and his wife Vida founded their Museum of Folk Arts to show their vast collections from both Europe and America, including several decorated American rooms. The display emphasized American popular crafts, which were shown together with examples of their European sources. One “American Corner” displayed a patchwork quilt, a hooked rug, a doll, a child’s rocking chair, and a cradle. Like Kuniyoshi, the Nadelmans collected toys and mixed American folk art with objects from other cultures, in their case European. In 1931, Kuniyoshi’s dealer Edith Halpert expanded the Downtown Gallery to include rooms on the second floor that she called the American Folk Art Gallery. She emphasized the relationship between folk and modern art.<sup>22</sup>

One reason behind the new enthusiasm for American folk art has been suggested by Wanda Corn. She has theorized that “the conversation around folk art focused on its being ‘ours’ rather than ‘others.’ The appetite for an indigenous folk, while primitivizing and romanticizing, expressed a desire for an imagined blood relationship to a national past.”<sup>23</sup>

This was just the kind of relationship to American “roots” that Kuniyoshi perhaps hoped to forge for himself through his passion for collecting America’s folk art. Judging from his work, he seems also to have realized at about the same time that he had a parallel bond to his native land through its folk art and folklore. It is thus that Kuniyoshi began to depict Japanese folk objects in his work.

Kuniyoshi’s concern with American and Japanese folk art coincides with the rise in Japan of a movement to recognize and preserve folk crafts, or *Mingei*, which were first promoted in the 1920s by Soetsu Yanagi (1889–1961).<sup>24</sup> To Yanagi, *Mingei* meant recognizing the value of the “purely Japanese world” of ordinary “household objects handmade by unknown craftsmen.” By the time of Kuniyoshi’s visit to Japan in 1931, Yanagi and his group had already held successful exhibitions of *Mingei* in prestigious stores in Tokyo and Kyoto.<sup>25</sup> In 1931, the *Mingei-kai* (Folk Craft Society) had launched its magazine, *Kogei (Crafts)*. *Mingei* theory both used ideas of modernism from the West and



W. L. Breeze, *Locomotive "Briar Cliff."* Collection unknown, photograph courtesy Sara Mazo Kuniyoshi.

served as a means to construct a national cultural identity for Japan.<sup>26</sup>

Kuniyoshi, like the *Mingei* proponents, absorbed Western ideas of modernism while also recalling Japanese traditions of his youth, and out of these influences he created his own hybrid identity.<sup>27</sup> To identify and understand the role of references to the folk culture of both his native and his adopted cultures, we must examine Kuniyoshi's art. His enthusiasm for American folk artifacts was a more complex response, and because of his bicultural status he often saw alternative meanings or made unexpected associations with American customs and cultural artifacts.

Looking back at the rage for folk culture in the United States during the twenties, composer Aaron Copland reflected in 1932, "The desire to be 'American' was symptomatic of the period."<sup>28</sup> The growing interest in American folk culture during the 1920s is certainly related to a racial nativism, which emerged so strongly that it influenced congressional debates on immigration restriction in 1920 and 1921. Labor unrest and an increase in radical political activity also contributed to growing xenophobia. The rampant spread of the Ku Klux Klan, which helped to incite the growing intolerance, occurred precisely at the same time that Americans were trying to identify their own native culture.

Kuniyoshi's "desire to be American" may have resulted from fear of persecution by those eager to combat the Yellow Peril, as Asian immigration was then called by growing numbers of Americans who feared being inundated from the East. In 1924, the year Kuniyoshi lent the two pieces of American folk art to the Whitney Studio Club, the United States implemented the Japanese Exclusion Act, which all but prohibited further immigration by people of Japanese descent.<sup>29</sup> The new laws also barred those Japanese already in the United States from becoming citizens and forbade them from purchasing property.

Despite the new laws and although Katherine Schmidt had lost her United States citizenship when she married Kuniyoshi, the couple managed to build a summer house in Woodstock, New York, in 1929. They found in the rural town not only the opportunity to collect additional examples of American folk art but also a congenial community of artists. Some of them, for instance Peggy Bacon, Alexander Brook, and German immigrant Konrad Cramer, shared Kuniyoshi's love of folk art.<sup>30</sup>

In his catalogue for Kuniyoshi's 1948 Whitney show, Lloyd Goodrich commented on *Japanese Toy Tiger and Odd Objects* and *Weather Vane and Sofa* of 1933:

*Image[s] of an animal, such as a Japanese toy tiger or a weathervane in the shape of a horse . . . [are] successors of the animals that had appeared in [Kuniyoshi's] early pictures, but now [they are] symbols instead of the actual creatures. These still-lives always seemed more than an assemblage of inanimate objects; they contained an element of symbolism, a suggestion of something beyond the things themselves. Speaking of his still-lives Kuniyoshi observes that one can paint any subject and give it wide implications.*<sup>31</sup>

Despite Kuniyoshi's broad hint, neither Goodrich nor anyone else has sufficiently taken into account the painter's various remarks about past memory and experience with regard to *Japanese Toy Tiger* and other still lifes. In 1940 Kuniyoshi described his early work as autobiographical, explaining that until his second trip to Europe in 1928 he had not tried "painting directly from the object. . . . It was rather difficult to change my approach since up to then I had painted almost entirely from my imagination and *my memories of the past*" [italics added].<sup>32</sup>

In another indication of the place of objects in his work, Kuniyoshi remarked in 1948 of his still-life pictures, "I picked up all kinds of materials—cigars and toys and weathervanes and the old sofa in Woodstock, where I was going then. I picked them for shapes, colors, textures—but sometimes when they were all together they take on symbolism for me."<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, Bruce Weber, in writing about Kuniyoshi's "symbolic still lifes," has concluded that *Japanese Toy Tiger and Odd Objects* lacked "symbolic content":

*Cigars appear, as does a cord and tassel. The toy paper-mâché tiger was one of a pair the artist purchased in Japan. Japanese Toy Tiger and Odd Objects was painted at the end of a five year period when Kuniyoshi was including exotic objects in some of his still lifes, before imbuing them with an overt symbolic content.*<sup>34</sup>

In notes he made in 1944 for a projected autobiography, Kuniyoshi wrote, "If a man feels deeply about the war, or any sorrow or gladness, his feeling should be symbolized in his expression, no matter what medium he chooses. Let us say still life. Still life is out of mode right now, but you can use symbols to say



Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *Fish Kite*, 1950. The Fukutake Collection, Okayama, Japan.

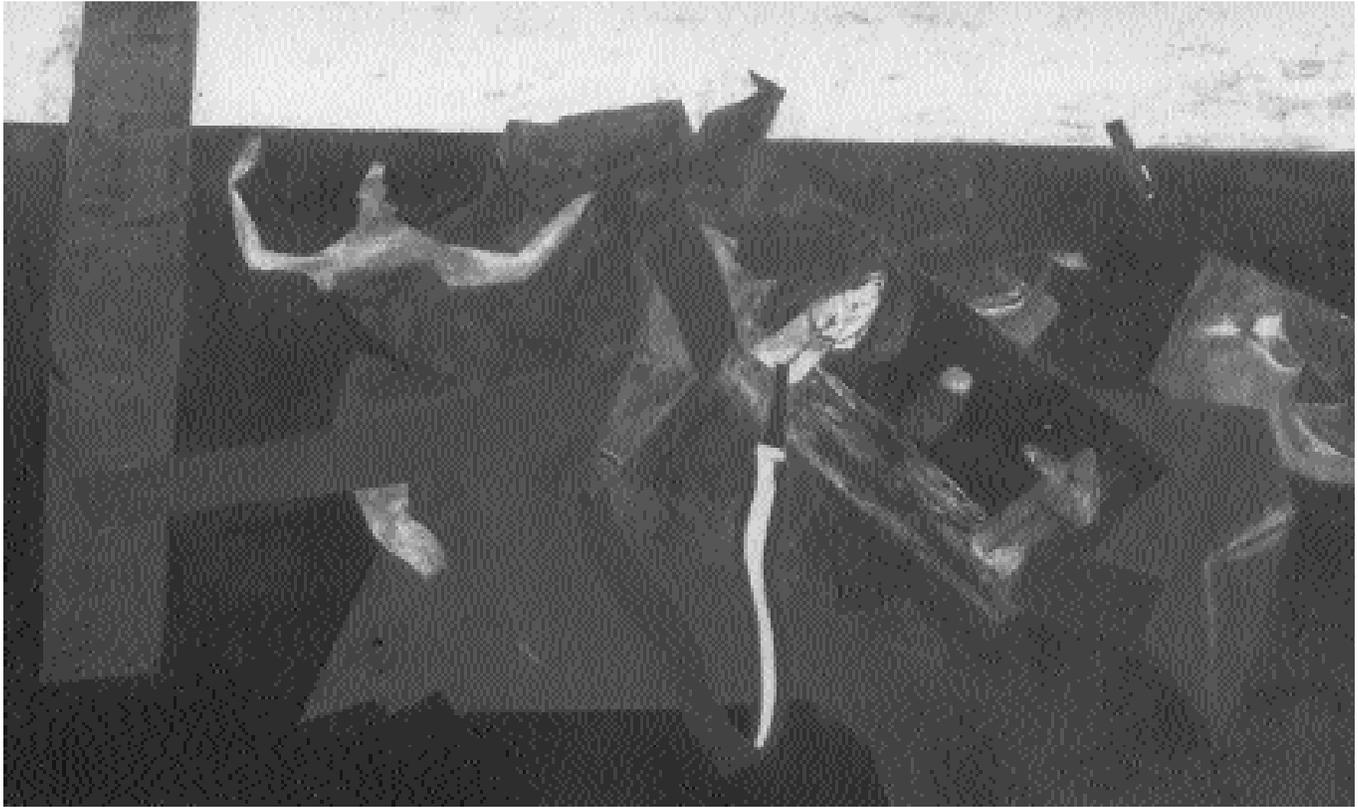
clearly how the sorrow or gladness is felt deeply in your heart."<sup>35</sup>

Following up on Kuniyoshi's hint of 1940, we can explicate *Japanese Toy Tiger and Odd Objects* and see that in the picture Kuniyoshi referred to Japanese and American customs that marked the pride and joy that attended the birth of a son. The *Kurashiki hariko*, a traditional type, was originally intended to celebrate the birth of the maker's first son, in what must have been the year of the tiger in the traditional Japanese Zodiac or lunar calendar. Hugo Munsterberg, advised by Soetsu Yanagi, noted that in Japan the tiger "is a symbol of strength associated with the annual Boys' Day festival on May fifth."<sup>36</sup> Kuniyoshi was surely aware that the bond between father and son is traditionally connected in Japanese folklore with this object, for he reinforced the association in his painting by adding cigars, traditionally given out in America by the proud father on the occasion of the birth of a son.

Kuniyoshi did not need to learn about Japanese attitudes favoring male children because he grew up in this milieu, and differences and similarities between Japanese and American customs associated with child-birth and gender seemed to have sparked his imagination. The American anthropologist Ruth Benedict discussed the Japanese attitude toward sons in her book *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture*:

Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *Upstream*, 1922. Denver Art Museum.





Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *Oriental Presents*, 1951. Collection Sara Mazo Kuniyoshi.

*Every Japanese man must have a son. He needs him to perpetuate the family line down the generations and to preserve the family honor and possessions. For traditional social reasons the father needs the son almost as much as the young son needs the father. The son will take his father's place in the on-going future and this is not felt as supplanting but as insuring the father.*<sup>37</sup>

In painting *Japanese Toy Tiger and Odd Objects*, Kuniyoshi seems to have been treating this theme. It was not a coincidence that he painted it soon after his ship departed from Japan and just after learning that his father had died.

Celebrating the birth of a son reappears as a theme in Kuniyoshi's painting *Fish Kite* of 1950. This intensely colored canvas depicts a boy holding up a kite in the form of one of the giant *koi-nobori*, or carp streamers, which are also associated with the Boys' Festival.<sup>38</sup> Traditionally, parents proudly hung on a pole outside their home a carp streamer for each of their sons. The carp symbolizes the parents' hope for a strong and healthy son, for it is the fish that swims upstream, no matter what the obstacles. Kuniyoshi had already alluded to this custom in an early painting he called *Upstream* (1922), where he depicted fish swimming around a couple in a rowboat, in which it is clear that the male figure is at the oars.

In *Fish Kite*, a boy holds up over his head the red and yellow *koi-nobori*, while two female acrobats and the legs of another circus figure balancing on a ball appear

on the left side of the composition. In the background on the upper right Kuniyoshi depicted a calendar page for July 4, marking the Independence Day celebration in America, the country where Kuniyoshi thrived as an artist.<sup>39</sup> The presence of the carp streamer recalls the Japanese father's pride in and hopes for his son, a reminder perhaps that it was Kuniyoshi's father who sacrificed to finance his son's emigration to America.

It may be that the national holiday observance of July 4th in America caught Kuniyoshi's imagination because it reminded him of the Japanese festivals that had been etched in his memory during his youth. The local celebrations in Okayama include the Momotaro Festival in the spring. *Momotaro*, or the little Peach boy, became the theme of Kuniyoshi's 1951 canvas entitled *Oriental Presents*. Emphasizing warm colors, this work features a dancing figure, a variety of gift wrap papers, a yellow paper party horn, and, on the right side, what appears to be an illustration of the Momotaro story, in which an elderly barren couple discover in the river a peach which contains a little boy, sent as a gift by God to keep them company.<sup>40</sup> Kuniyoshi's widow, Sara, has confirmed that her husband owned a book that contained the much-loved tale of Momotaro.

The subject of the dutiful son who brings his parents riches when he returns triumphant from a quest to vanquish the enemy in a foreign land is a theme that occurs with frequency in other Japanese folk tales.<sup>41</sup> It is alluded to by the placement of a small traditional toy

drum in Kuniyoshi's 1921 ink drawing *Baby and Toy Cow*, which he considered important enough to reproduce in the first monograph of his work.<sup>42</sup> In this drawing, a baby, whom at least one scholar has identified as "apparently Asian," crawls on a blanket toward three toys: a sailboat, a cow on a platform with wheels, and a toy drum on a stick.<sup>43</sup> Called a *den den taiko*, this traditional toy drum is decorated here with a yin-yang symbol, emblematic in folk tales of "diviners," who can "interpret the meaning of puzzling events."<sup>44</sup>

The *den den taiko* is a small drum that is rotated so that the solid objects at the end of two strings repeatedly strike the drum heads, creating sounds known as *den den*.<sup>45</sup> Drums and flutes were some of the most typical souvenirs of Japanese festivals, and they were purchased by parents eager to perpetuate ancient traditions by encouraging children to imitate musicians.<sup>46</sup> This toy drum is also a common example of *Mingei*. As such, the *den den taiko* appears in Japanese woodblock prints (*ukiyo-e*) that depict children or monkeys playing at festivals.<sup>47</sup> The *den den taiko* also features in a least one nursery song, the text of which is worth examining:

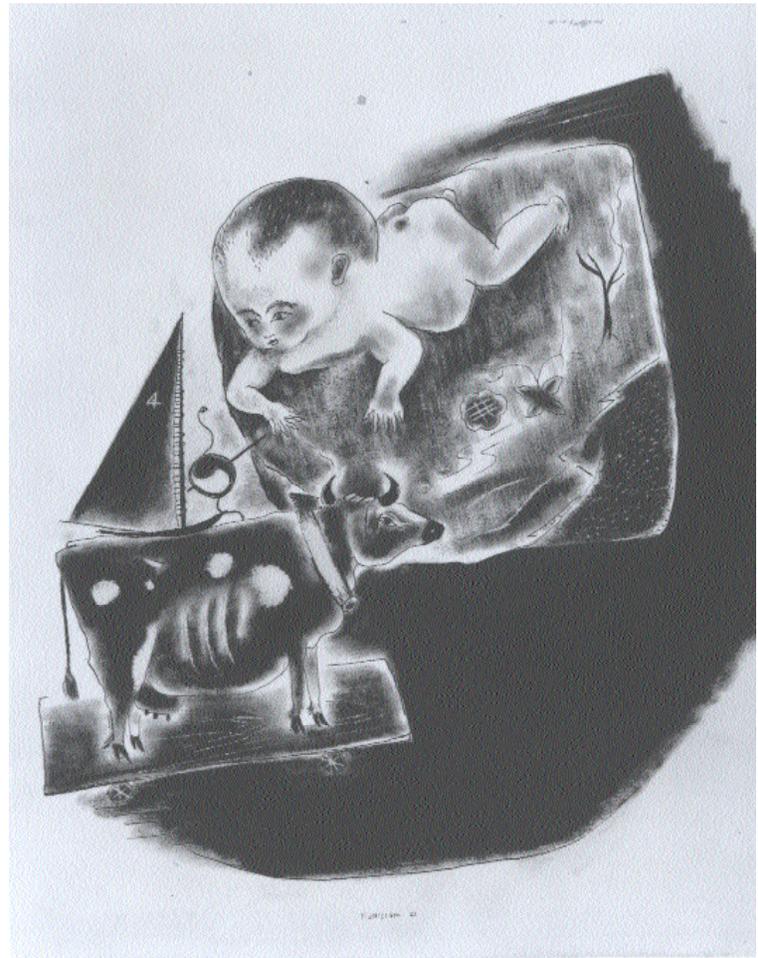
*Little boy, you are a good boy.  
Sleep, sleep well, my little boy.  
Where is your nurse,  
Who puts you to sleep?*

*She's gone to the village, over that mountain.  
What are her souvenirs from the village?  
A den-den drum and pan pipes,  
A daruma doll and toy hand drum.*<sup>48</sup>

Kuniyoshi may well have recalled not only the drum but also the song about it, as he even recalled singing Japanese songs in class at the Art Students League.<sup>49</sup> And, as we have seen, the concept of being the "good boy," the good son, remained in his consciousness, and references to his Japanese boyhood occurred in such late works as *Japanese Toy Tiger and Odd Objects* or *Fish Kite*.

Kuniyoshi's use of *Mingei* in this drawing is not limited to the *den den taiko* but also includes the cow on wheels, one of a number of common Japanese folk toys that represent animals on wheels, which Japanese once believed protected children from small pox and other illness by their "pin-pin" sounds.<sup>50</sup> Among the most popular animals are cows, especially the red cow, known as an *aka-beko*.<sup>51</sup>

The presence of a cow was yet another link between Japanese folklore and Kuniyoshi's art, as he himself later noted when he pointed out their recurrence in pictures he produced during the early 1920s. Citing Japanese folk custom, Kuniyoshi explained, "I was painting cows and cows at that time because somehow I felt very near to the cow. Besides I thought I understood the animal. You see I was born, judging by the Japanese calendar, in a 'cow year.' According to legend I believed my fate to be guided, more or less, by the



Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *Baby and Toy Cow*, 1921. Brooklyn Museum of Art, Bequest of Edith and Milton Lowenthal.

bovine kingdom."<sup>52</sup> His early landscapes that included cows and often featured an aerial perspective, or a bird's eye view, are *White Cow in Marsh*, *Maud*, *Barnyard*, and *Village* (1921); *Two Cows*, *The Dream*, and *Sunday Morning* (1922); and *Little Joe with Cow and Milkmaid* (1923). Referring to several of these works, Lloyd Goodrich noted, "This is the Oriental concept of pictorial perspective shown in Japanese and Chinese landscape painting. It is curious that this concept should appear in Kuniyoshi's work after the orthodox Western perspective of his student days."<sup>53</sup> Despite his awareness that these works were stylistically akin to Asian art, Goodrich did not recognize the role that traditional Japanese tales had had in inscribing these animals into Kuniyoshi's imagination.

Kuniyoshi's familiarity with Japanese folklore seems obvious when one takes a close look at what he painted in his early period. Reading any anthology of Japanese tales makes it evident that the animals that populate his early paintings and drawings—snakes, birds, cows, horses, frogs, octopi, and fish—also appear frequently in the folk literature of his native land.<sup>54</sup> Animals from Japanese folklore had evidently merged in Kuniyoshi's mind with animals and farms that he

saw in Maine and found represented in American folklore and the bible. In his rendition of *Adam and Eve (The Fall of Man)* of 1922, Kuniyoshi's composition adds a cow and a crow to his depiction of the couple's encounter with the snake. His *Boy with Cow* (1921) relates to several Japanese folk tales, including "The Meadowlark Cowherd," about a boy who was supposed to look after the cows and horses, and "The Ox-Leader and the Yamauba," a story that has been documented in Okayama, the prefecture where Kuniyoshi grew up.<sup>55</sup> Kuniyoshi would be exceptional if, as a child, he had not heard such folk tales, which according to Yanagita Kunio were not written down until the early twentieth century.<sup>56</sup>

Kuniyoshi must also have had Japanese folklore in mind when he conceived of the paintings *Boy Frightened by Snake* of 1921 and *Dream* of 1922, as well as the drawing *Bad Dream* of 1924. Jane Myers has recognized that "the imaginary themes of *The Dream* and *Bad Dream*, while prevalent in Japanese legend and a wide range of folk literature, also reflect the modernists' emphasis on intuition as a creative source and a general fascination with dreams at a time when Freudian dream analysis had entered the popular mainstream." She continues that "in fact some commentators, per-

plexed at the source of the cow imagery, held Freudian psychology accountable: 'Mr. Kuniyoshi has a complex for cows.'<sup>57</sup> If Kuniyoshi was in fact familiar with the Freudian fad of interpreting dreams, he may have easily associated it to Japanese folklore, in which dreams play an important role.

Kuniyoshi's *Boy Frightened by Snake* prompted Tom Wolf to comment that it "typifies the eccentricity of some of the paintings that he showed that year," and he further suggests the influence of German Expressionists affiliated with *Der Blaue Reiter*, specifically Heinrich Campendonk and Albert Bloch.<sup>58</sup> Wolf asserts that the work's "strange psychology" is "peculiar to Kuniyoshi" and that "it is very unusual for an artist to make the emotion of fear a work's primary subject," while correctly noting that "Kuniyoshi did so repeatedly."<sup>59</sup>

The notion that Kuniyoshi had suffered enough fear to have taken seriously the superstitions alluded to in Japanese folk tales and toys is reinforced by his drawing *Boy Frightened by Lightning* (1921) and by *Child Frightened by Water* (1924). In Japan toy snakes are still routinely produced for the "Year of the Snake," and snakes appear frequently in Japanese folk narratives.<sup>60</sup> Clearly, Kuniyoshi's choice of motifs suggests that he

Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *Dream*, 1922. Bridgestone Museum of Art, Ishibashi Foundation, Tokyo.



registered the fear of snakes, lightning, and the sea that was so common in Japan, making it likely that he also concerned himself with threats of disease, demons, and evil spirits which, along with ghosts, monsters, and dragons often populate Japanese legend and lore.<sup>61</sup>

The snake recurs in the center of *Dream*, the oil painting, and *The Dream*, a related drawing of the same year, both of which are buttressed on one side by a cow and by a little girl with outstretched arms—as if she is sleepwalking—on the other. A larger clue to the origin of this theme for Kuniyoshi is his drawing *Bad Dream* of 1924, in which numerous monstrous dragons attack and abduct nude women, and the tail end of a cow has turned into a horse-like animal.

Dragons are often associated in Japanese lore with water or depicted, as they are here, attacking a nude woman (perhaps a female goddess) as she bathes.<sup>62</sup> According to Royall Tyler, “Related associations [in Japanese culture] are with thunder and lightning on the one hand and lust on the other—in other words, with primordial manifestations of energy and vitality.”<sup>63</sup> Although he was not referring to Kuniyoshi or even to the visual arts, Tyler’s description fits this drawing perfectly, down to the dragon making thunder in the upper left quadrant. Tom Wolf has suggested that *Bad Dream* “can be related to Japanese art [works] . . . depicting two well-known Japanese deities . . . *Shinrai*, the Thunder God, with his great Wind God, at the far right.”<sup>64</sup> However, he concludes, “Kuniyoshi’s references to Japanese culture generally were not as literal as they are in *Bad Dream*, and additional insight into his cross-cultural approach can be gained by looking more closely at Hamilton Easter Field and his beliefs about what art should be.”<sup>65</sup> To the contrary, my evidence suggests that many specific references to Japanese culture in Kuniyoshi’s work have been overlooked.

Having explained the frequency of cows in his early pictures, in 1940 Kuniyoshi went on to explain what he painted after the cows: “I turned to babies. People think that babies are beautiful, but I thought otherwise and so I painted babies and babies.”<sup>66</sup> In his painting called *Two Babies* of 1923, the toy bird held by the older child appears to be a rattle. The idea of a child with a noisemaker recalls a Japanese folk toy in the shape of a pigeon, which functions as a whistle. Called a *hato-bue*, it was given to little children who were encouraged to make noise intended to frighten away an evil spirit thought to cause hysteria.

Convinced that Kuniyoshi had depicted another Japanese folk toy, I searched in vain in contemporary Japanese shops for just such a toy bird on a stick. I was somewhat cheered when I came upon a horse’s head on a stick, known as a *haru koma* (jumping horse), complete with attached bells, which serve as noisemakers. But my hunch paid off when I finally located a Japanese picture book of woodblock prints from 1913, which depicts folk toys, including a toy bird rat-



Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *Two Babies*, 1923. Fukutake Collection, Okayama, Japan.

tle on a stick.<sup>67</sup> Kuniyoshi may have added an American touch, painting red and green “Christmas” streamers and what could be a Mexican *piñata* (or just a bell made out of crepe paper) above the children’s heads. It is worth noting here that it was not just Japanese folk toys that Kuniyoshi enjoyed. His widow recalls how much her husband loved toys, how he liked to look for them at a Japanese store that he used to visit on East 59th Street in New York, and how he even collected toys in Mexico, when they traveled there in 1935.<sup>68</sup>

The circumstances of Kuniyoshi’s childhood in Japan may have prompted his choice of subject in another painting, *Boy Stealing Fruit* (1923), which depicts a small boy snatching a peach and a banana. When Kuniyoshi first exhibited this work in his show at the Daniel Gallery in 1924, his Japanese point of view was not lost on the enthusiastic critic Henry McBride, who wrote, “This Japanese, in spite of his early advent to these shores is still a Japanese, and sees things in the civilization that we have arranged much as an arrival from Mars might.”<sup>69</sup> But to others, this work suggested a strong relationship to American folk art. “His *Boy Stealing Fruit* is like an accentuated copy of

American provincial painting (at its hard, bright, objective best), with a stressing of aesthetic significance," wrote Martha Candler Cheney in 1939.<sup>70</sup> Kuniyoshi's method of depicting fruit silhouetted against a flat background does have a relationship to the simplified appearance of fruit in nineteenth-century American folk painting. In addition, his *Still Life* (1926), painted on the back of glass in the manner of folk art in New England, Pennsylvania, Bohemia, Bavaria, and elsewhere, attests to his regard for such pictures, an enthusiasm that he shared with Hartley and a number of other modernists.

Bananas, pineapples, and other tropical fruit that were not appropriate for cultivation in Japan's climate, first appeared there as imports at the beginning of the Meiji era (1868–1912), and, among the Japanese, their appearance prompted interest in foreign countries. In Kuniyoshi's youth all fruit was quite expensive in Japan (as it still is today), but bananas were particularly dear, and bananas appear so often in Kuniyoshi's early paintings that it is as if he could not quite get enough of them, even in America.<sup>71</sup>

*Boy Stealing Fruit* and other works contributed to a controversy that ensued when the newly founded Museum of Modern Art in New York featured Kuniyoshi as one of "Nineteen Living Americans" in a show that opened in 1929. At issue was whether Kuniyoshi could be considered an American artist. Several critics, reflecting a nativist bias, questioned his inclusion, while works by John Sloan, Edward Hopper, Rockwell Kent, Charles Burchfield, and most of the other prominent artists of his day went unchallenged.<sup>72</sup>

Kuniyoshi's elegant *Self-Portrait as a Golf Player* (1927), in which he clearly wears his Asian ethnicity proudly, provoked the xenophobia of those who debated his participation. For example, Helen A. Read argued that "room should have been made" for George Luks and Childe Hassam "at the expense of a Bulgarian, a Japanese and a German," referring to Jules Pascin, Kuniyoshi, and Lyonel Feininger.<sup>73</sup> Perhaps because of such carping critics, even the honor of the museum's decision to include him was insufficient to convince Kuniyoshi that he had reached a level of fame sufficient to impress his family in Japan. In 1940 he recalled how when he was summoned back to see his ailing father in 1932, he had been waiting to plan a visit and was still looking for "the point where father could be truly proud of me."<sup>74</sup>

Besides Japanese traditional toys, customs, and folk tales, I have identified Kuniyoshi's use of other references to Japanese folk culture, including festivals and masks. His memory of and fascination with such elements certainly facilitated, if it did not actually help to stimulate, his interest in the folk art and customs of his adopted land.

A mask first appeared in Kuniyoshi's *Upside Down Table and Mask* (1940). Traditional masks were featured in Okayama in the festivals following *Momotaro* on the

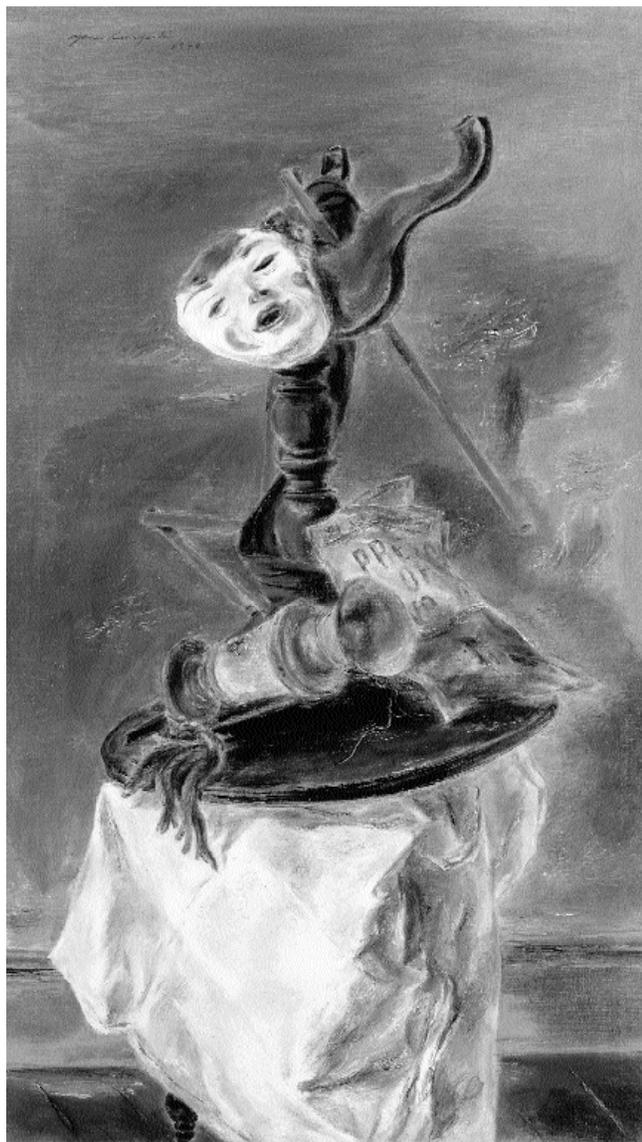


Plate from Seifu Shimizu, *Unai No Tomo [Japanese Folk Toys]*, 1913.

calendar, including the *Bitcho Kaguro* (an ancient dance music) festival each October and November and the *Achi Shrine* festival on the third weekend in October. Masks, which were often worn by dancers, were also "the most typical memento of a festival."<sup>75</sup>

That Kuniyoshi painted a mask at a time of mounting hostilities, just before the war, is significant. In some senses he must have felt that he needed a mask, as his friend sculptor Robert Laurent hinted when he recalled walking out with Kuniyoshi after Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney's funeral at Saint Bartholomew's Church in Manhattan, in April 1942: "It was during the Second World War and as Yas and I walked down the Avenue together, it seemed to me that the crowds along the sidewalks were all staring at Yas, as if an enemy were in their midst."<sup>76</sup>

In February 1940, Kuniyoshi gave a speech at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Choosing the title "What is an American Art," he argued against the rising tide of nationalism in the United States, asserting, "If the individual lives and works in a given local [sic] for a length of time, regardless of nationality, work produced there becomes indigenous to that country."<sup>77</sup>



Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *Upside Down Table and Mask*, 1940. The Fukutake Collection, Okayama, Japan.

Certainly at this time Kuniyoshi's world had already turned upside down, just as the objects in his still life were topsy-turvy.

Kuniyoshi already in 1937 had sought to claim a unique identity and to distance himself from any reductive and stereotypical labels in the face of growing anti-Japanese sentiment in the United States and considering his own stand against the militarist policies then prevailing in Japan. To an interviewer for *Esquire* he made clear that he "strongly resent[ed] the light manner in which his work is classified on a racial basis, as that of a Japanese or Japanese-American. I can't be very much Oriental," he observed, "I have spent most of my life here. I have been educated here and I have suffered here. I am as much of an individual as anyone—except that I have Oriental blood in my veins."<sup>78</sup>

In the statement he made in the *Magazine of Art* in 1940, Kuniyoshi clearly expressed his desire to fuse East and West into a new cultural identity. Looking

back on more than two decades of painting, he declared that the goal of his art was "to combine the rich traditions of the East with my accumulative experience and viewpoint of the West,"<sup>79</sup> this at a time when the United States had begun a "full scale economic war against Japan," prompted by Japanese aggression in China and elsewhere in Asia.<sup>80</sup>

Kuniyoshi's emphasis on his American experience intensified after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, when his status changed from "resident alien" to "enemy alien." He was placed under house arrest in New York, and government authorities confiscated his camera, radios, and binoculars, even though he had long been a member of liberal and anti-fascist organizations, including the American Artists' Congress, for which he served as vice president.<sup>81</sup> In any event, he was more fortunate than the Japanese Americans living in the American West, whom the government forced into internment camps. Kuniyoshi instead remained in New York and engaged in various pro-American activities, including two United States war propaganda speeches that he wrote for shortwave radio broadcast in Japan. He also designed posters for the Office of War Information. Moreover, despite anti-Japanese feelings among the citizenry during the war, Kuniyoshi's colleagues in the art world continued to support him.

As hostilities between Japan and the United States mounted, Kuniyoshi publicized his close ties to American culture, including the fact that he had condemned the Japanese invasion of China.<sup>82</sup> Kuniyoshi was now literally caught between two worlds, America, his home since 1906, where he had studied, worked, and twice married, and Japan, his birthplace and the source of his ethnicity and citizenship. In 1932 he had remarked, "I know very clearly that I am a Japanese. However deeply a Japanese enters a Western country, ultimately he cannot become a Westerner."<sup>83</sup> Such feelings must certainly have intensified by the war.

Kuniyoshi's angst is poignantly expressed in his canvas *Between Two Worlds* of 1939. In this evocative picture three women wearing shorts walk across a rather barren summer landscape with a dead tree prominent in the middle ground, against which rests a broken wheel. In the distance, beyond what may be a tomb in the foreground, an institutional building resembling a prison or a warehouse stands out at the top of a hill. Whatever the building is, it is not inviting, and the women neither look at it nor move toward it as they walk. The stresses of the build-up to war took their toll. By the summer of 1940 Kuniyoshi was suffering from such a serious case of depression that some of his close friends and students organized a sketch tour of New England.<sup>84</sup>

If Kuniyoshi did not feel he could become a Westerner, at least he could go West, which is what he did in 1941. Already separated from his second wife, Sara Mazo, he traveled by car, once again accompanied by a

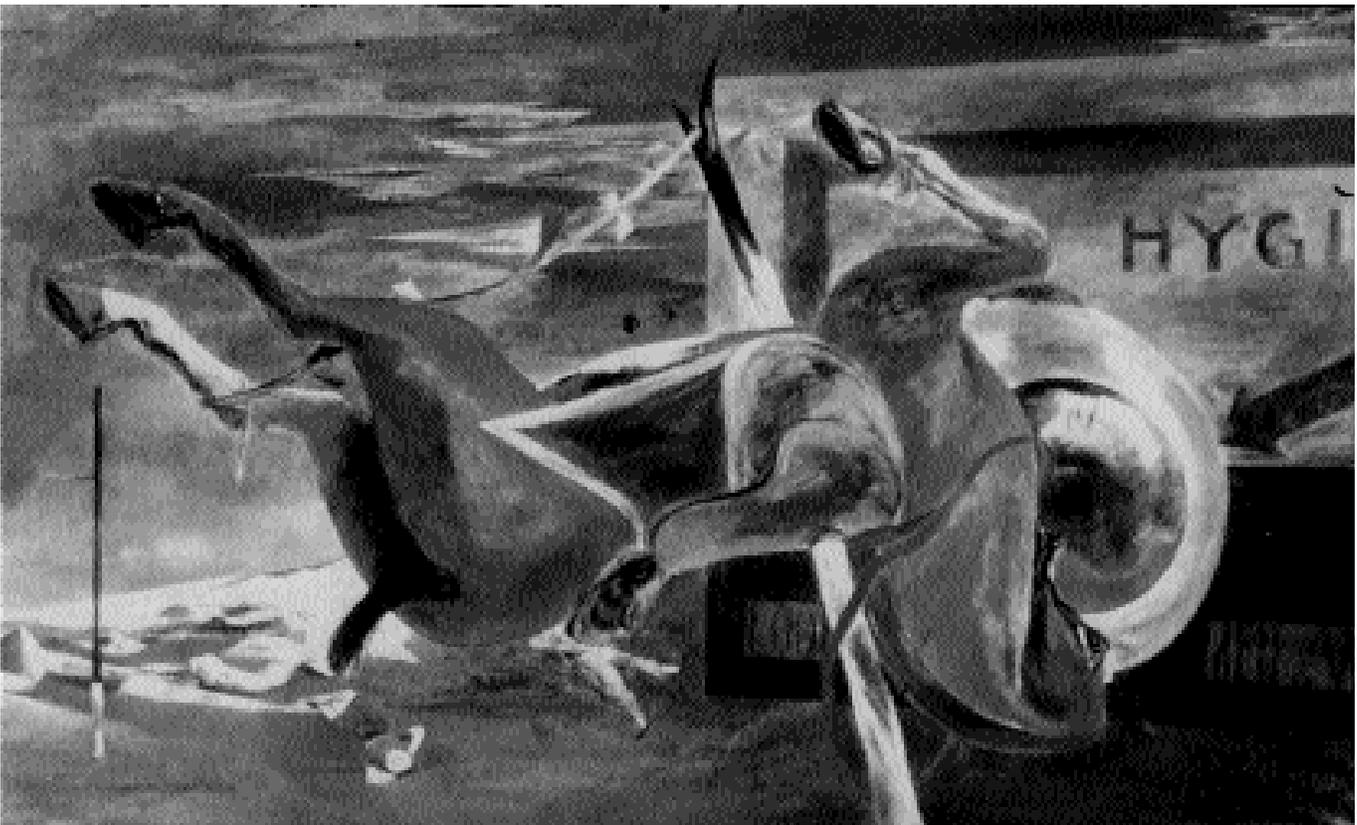
group of concerned friends and students, visiting New Mexico, Colorado, Nevada, and California in the course of the summer. He drank in the wide, open landscape and the somber tonalities of the desert. He painted Western themes such as *Cow Girl*, *Colorado Landscape*, *Cripple Creek*, *Nevadaville*, and *Silver Gulch*. Perhaps by seeking out America's frontier, Kuniyoshi hoped to become more American in this troubled time. In August when he wrote to his dealer, Edith Halpert, from Colorado Springs, he enthused, "I have been here about a month because I like this place although so fantastic. So many interesting spots. . . . As international situation grows worse, this is really the place for me, & haven't heard a remark or concern about my being here. Certainly people's attitude is so different from the East, therefore I feel comfortable."<sup>85</sup>

Kuniyoshi's comfort was not to last. After the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and the United States declared war on Japan the following day, he headed up a committee of eight Japanese artists living in the United States who issued a declaration of American loyalty and opposition to the Japanese military. Interestingly, in one of the two United States war propaganda speeches that he wrote, he recalled "Japan as a beautiful country of pine and flowers, with a background of volcanic mountain shapes. A country with a rich heritage of custom, tradition, and culture."<sup>86</sup> Besides this and other work for the United States Office

of War Information, Kuniyoshi was president of the group that sponsored "Artists for Victory: An Exhibition of Contemporary American Art" at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.<sup>87</sup> He could not participate in the show however because only American citizens were allowed and he was not eligible for citizenship. The next year Kuniyoshi won first prize at the Carnegie Institute show "Painting in the United States, 1944," for his *Room 110*, one of 311 entries, and the United States Supreme Court upheld the forced detention of Japanese Americans in relocation camps. In the minority dissenting opinion, Justice Frank Murphy noted the camps reflected an "erroneous assumption of racial guilt rather than bona fide military necessity."<sup>88</sup>

A carousel horse, which, except for its monumental size, recalls Japanese folk toys as well as the pageantry of Japanese festivals, took center stage in one of Kuniyoshi's most important postwar paintings, *Festivities Ended*. Begun in 1939, when he photographed a carousel horse, he did not finish the canvas until 1947. Carousels were in their heyday at the moment of Kuniyoshi's arrival in the United States and only began to deteriorate during the Depression, when they were neglected, enabling Kuniyoshi to acquire the horse that he painted. He probably knew the famous carousel at Coney Island, but it is not known if he knew that carousels were a French invention or that they were made in the United States by immigrant craftsmen who

Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *Festivities Ended*, 1947. The Okayama Prefectural Museum of Art, Okayama.



were said to have expressed in them “their dreams of what coming to America meant.”<sup>89</sup>

In *Festivities Ended*, the recurring figure of a carousel horse is upended and shown looming over two small reclining figures in the littered landscape below. This picture expresses the depression Kuniyoshi acknowledged and, indirectly, the complex history of relations between Japan and the United States, a theme that recurs across Kuniyoshi’s art and career. Asked by Goodrich in 1948 about this painting, Kuniyoshi remarked: “The world is chaotic today, but we must go on.” On another occasion the same year, he responded to Goodrich’s understated query, “Was there conflict for you during the war?,” by saying, “[That is ] also the way things are [now] going in this country. Not going any better but now getting worse—a sort of hopelessness. One can’t help having it.”<sup>90</sup> Thus, Kuniyoshi alluded to issues such as racism and the increasing persecution by the government of those thought to have been Communists, including some of his friends, among them Japanese artists then living in America.<sup>91</sup>

Such identity in crisis may have been behind the many masks that appear after the war in such paintings as *I Wear a Mask Today* (1946–1947); *The Clown, Charade, Clown with Mask*, and *Last Act* (1948); *Carnival* (1949), and *Revelation* and *To the Ball* (1950); *Mask and Masquerade* (1951); and *Fakirs, Mr. Ace, Amazing Juggler*, and *The Juggler* (all 1952). One of his students, the painter Paul Jenkins, recalled finding in a New York antique shop a Japanese Noh drama mask, which he acquired and presented to his teacher, who, clearly moved by the student’s thoughtful gift, reciprocated by giving him a small painting.<sup>92</sup>

After the war it must have been a great relief to Kuniyoshi when he resumed communication with both his extended family and friends in Japan—and with his native culture. To Yoshie Nakata, whom he met in Tokyo on his trip to Japan in 1931–1932, he recounted how the changing seasons in Woodstock reminded him of Japan.<sup>93</sup> Another time he described how he bought Japanese food such as tofu, cuttlefish, and eel in New York, as well as how he and Sara (reunited after the separation) had learned to make *tsukemono* (Japanese pickles).<sup>94</sup> Kuniyoshi wrote to Nakata in 1950 asking about a Gifu *cho-chi-n*, a lantern made in Gifu prefecture and often used there in both daily life and festivals.<sup>95</sup> It was also after the war that Kuniyoshi began to study Zen Buddhism, but this was an interest also pursued by American artists in New York (from John Cage to Jasper Johns) during the post-war years.<sup>96</sup>

In 1940 Kuniyoshi’s friend Carl Zigrosser published an article on the painter’s graphic work in which Kuniyoshi affirmed that despite his refusal to be categorized by “Oriental blood” or his pro-American politics, he “wished to express the thought of the East, my race . . . using the tradition of expressing inner thoughts through a full realization of the matter of my



Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *Mr. Ace*, 1952. The Fukutake Collection, Okayama, Japan.

experience.”<sup>97</sup> This recurrent emphasis on his own “experience” implies that he often tapped an autobiographical vein in his art. Although Kuniyoshi explicitly emphasized the hold of “memories of the past” on his imagination, his aim to combine traditional Japanese culture with new Western strains has been largely neglected or overlooked by scholars in their interpretations of the content of his work.

To understand Kuniyoshi’s intentions, we need to reconsider the outspoken opposition to the nationalism of Thomas Hart Benton and others, which Kuniyoshi addressed in his “What is an American Art” speech.

“Cultural assimilation does take place,” he pointed out, insisting that “American art today is the product of a conglomeration of customs and traditions of many peoples . . . a culmination not only of native but [also of] foreign forces.”<sup>98</sup> He went on to remind his audience that both Degas and Van Gogh made use of Japanese art and argued, “If these artists did not find alien influence a menace, why should we?”<sup>99</sup> Thus, to begin to fully understand both the content and the style of Kuniyoshi’s art, we need to examine it closely in the contexts of both American and Japanese culture and traditions. ■

---

## NOTES

This essay and my interest in Yasuo Kuniyoshi developed as a result of Mutsuko Hoshino’s journey to New York from Japan, where she was engaged in writing her doctoral dissertation. In my class at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, she encouraged me to take an interest in Kuniyoshi and introduced me to Ritsuko T. Ozawa, then curator of the Kuniyoshi Museum. Without them this article would not exist. I also wish to thank the artist’s widow, Sara Mazo Kuniyoshi, for speaking with me on many occasions and for providing me with help in my research; Dr. Judith K. Zilczer for her generous advice; Marian Goldberg; and the Research Foundation of the City University of New York that helped to fund my research travel to Japan.

1. Hamilton Easter Field, “Paintings and Drawings by Yasuo Kuniyoshi until January 17, Daniel Gallery,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 15 January 1922, section C, 12.
2. William Murrell, *Yasuo Kuniyoshi* (Woodstock, N.Y.: William M. Fisher, Younger Artists Series No. 4, 1922), n.p.
3. Review of Daniel Gallery show of January 1923, unidentified clipping, Yasuo Kuniyoshi papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (hereafter Kuniyoshi papers), microfilm reel D176, frame 88.
4. Lloyd Goodrich, *Yasuo Kuniyoshi* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1948), 13–23; Jane Myers and Tom Wolf, *The Shores of a Dream: Yasuo Kuniyoshi’s Early Work in America* (Fort Worth, Tex.: Amon Carter Museum, 1996), 36–38, 56–58.
5. Yasuo Kuniyoshi, “East to West,” *Magazine of Art* 33, no. 2 (February 1940): 80.
6. Alexandra Munroe, “The War Years and their Aftermath: 1940–1953,” in *Yasuo Kuniyoshi* (Tokyo: Tokyo Metropolitan Teien Art Museum, 1989), 43, quoting Goodrich, *Kuniyoshi*, 13.
7. *Ibid.*, 43.
8. Yasuo Kuniyoshi to Carl Zigrosser, 13 November 1931, Carl Zigrosser papers, Van Pelt Library, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pa.
9. “An Accumulation of Sadness,” *PM*, 27 November 1944, 17.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Tekiho Nisizawa, *Japanese Folk-Toys* (Tokyo: Board of Tourist Industry, Japanese Government Railway), 26.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Harry Salpeter, in “Yasuo Kuniyoshi: Artist’s Artist,” *Esquire*, April 1937, 215, reports that one of the two works was “a Crucifixion which he [Kuniyoshi] describes as a strange thing, in nobody’s manner.” For a reproduction of this work, see Myers and Wolf, *Shores of a Dream*, 23.
14. Hamilton Easter Field, “Reviewing January 1922,” *Arts* 2 (January 1922): 193, quoted in Doreen Bolger, “Hamilton Easter Field and his Contribution to American Modernism,” *American Art Journal* 20, no. 2 (1988): 93.
15. Hamilton Easter Field, “Farewell Till the Fall,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 9 May 1920, 10, quoted in Bolger, “Field,” 93.
16. Field collected and wrote about *ukiyo-e* (woodblock prints) and Japanese art, including “The Art of [Utagawa] Kuniyoshi,” *Arts and Decoration* 7 (March 1917): 251–253. Having just written about Utagawa Kuniyoshi, Field would have noticed Yasuo Kuniyoshi’s work when he chanced upon it at the Society of Independents. See William Green, “Hamilton Easter Field: Artist from Brooklyn and Early Connoisseur of Japanese Prints,” *Impressions: Official Publication of the Ukiyo-e Society of America*, no. 8 (Summer 1983): 4–12.
17. See Gail Levin, “Marsden Hartley’s ‘Amerika’ Between Native American and German Folk Art,” *American Art Review* 5, no. 2 (Winter 1993): 120–125, 170–171.

18. Although Kuniyoshi is listed as the lender in the catalogue for this show, he told Lloyd Goodrich that his first wife, Katherine Schmidt, bought the picture of the engine for fifteen dollars and sold it to Frank Osborn for one hundred dollars when she need money (Goodrich, notes of 13 January 1948, Whitney Museum of American Art artists' files and records, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution [hereafter Whitney artists' records], microfilm reel N670, frame 76. See "Early American Art," 9–24 February 1924, Kuniyoshi papers, microfilm reel D176, frames 148–151, in which *Locomotive 'Briar Cliff,'* no. 8, and the carved wooden cow, no. 39, are both listed as lent by Kuniyoshi.
19. "Two Exhibitions in Whitney Galleries," *New York Herald*, 17 February 1924, Kuniyoshi papers, microfilm reel D176, frame 147.
20. "Sadness," *PM*.
21. Dorothy Varian (who rented an Ogunquit studio in 1923), interview conducted by Wanda Corn, 1965, quoted in Wanda Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915–1935* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 394, n. 57.
22. See Diane Tepfer, "Edith Gregor Halpert and the Downtown Gallery: Downtown, 1926–1940. A Study in American Art Patronage" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1989), 46.
23. Corn, *Great American Thing*, 323–324, 326.
24. See Yuko Kikuchi, "Hybridity and the Oriental Orientalism of *Mingei* Theory," *Journal of Design History* 10, no. 4 (1997): 343–354. See also Soetsu Yanagi, *The Unknown Craftsman: A Japanese Insight into Beauty* (Tokyo, 1972).
25. Kyoko Utsumi Mimura, "Soetsu Yanagi and the Legacy of the Unknown Craftsman," *Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts*, (1994): 211. These exhibitions took place in Tokyo in 1927 and 1928 and in Kyoto in 1929.
26. Kikuchi, "Hybridity," 346. The magazine *Kogei* was replaced in 1952 by *Mingei* magazine.
27. In pointing out this duality, I am careful to avoid the reductive extremes of nativism and assimilation. See for example, Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996), 66.
28. Aaron Copland, "The Composer and His Critic," *Modern Music* 9, no. 4 (May–June 1932): 143.
29. William L. Neumann, *America Encounters Japan: From Perry to MacArthur* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press), 176–177: "The quota system applied to European states by the legislation would have legalized less than 150 Japanese admissions yearly."
30. In Cramer's case, we know that he had responded to the international collection of folk art reproduced along with modern art in a copy he owned of *Der Blaue Reiter*, the almanac edited by Vasily Kandinsky and Franz Marc (Vasily Kandinsky and Franz Marc, *Der Blaue Reiter* [Munich: Piper Verlag, 1912]). Cramer's copy of this book, which he could have shown to Kuniyoshi, survives in a private collection. Examples of Japanese art are included in the almanac.
31. Goodrich, based on his notes on a conversation with Yasuo Kuniyoshi, 5 February 1948, Whitney artists' records, microfilm reel N670, frame 85.
32. Kuniyoshi, "East to West," 80.
33. Yasuo Kuniyoshi quoted in Aline B. Loucheim, "Kuniyoshi: Look, My Past," *Art News* 47, no. 2 (April 1948): 47.
34. Bruce Weber, "Yasuo Kuniyoshi's Symbolic Still Lives: Mind at Work," in *Yasuo Kuniyoshi: Artist as Photographer* (West Palm Beach, Fla.: Norton Gallery and School of Art, 1983), 37.
35. Yasuo Kuniyoshi, "Preliminary Notes for an Autobiography," August 1944, typescript, 17A and 17B, unmicrofilmed, Kuniyoshi papers.
36. Hugo Munsterberg, *The Folk Arts of Japan* (Rutland, Vt.: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1958), acknowledgments, 102.
37. Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (Rutland, Vt.: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1946), 255. Katherine Schmidt suggested to Goodrich that he read this book.
38. These carp streamers are still produced both as streamers, made of cloth, and as paper kites.
39. July 4 was also the birthday of his second wife, Sara Mazo Kuniyoshi, but it seems unlikely that he would have expected this to be communicated to anyone in his audience but her. See Yoshio Ozawa, *Kuniyoshi Yasuo: Hyoden [Yasuo Kuniyoshi: A Critical Biography]* (Tokyo: Shinchosha, 1974), 259.
40. Josephine Bloodgood came to this conclusion independently of my work; see *At Woodstock: Kuniyoshi* (Woodstock, N.Y.: Woodstock Artists Association, 2003), 24, 29, n. 32, where she notes that Ben Caswell suggested to her that *Oriental Presents* depicts the tale of Momotaro. She does not discuss further the significant role of Japanese folk tales in Kuniyoshi's art.
41. See Fanny Hagin Mayer, ed., *The Yanagita Kunio Guide to the Japanese Folk Tale* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1986, first published in Japanese in 1948), 35, 3.
42. Murrell, *Yasuo Kuniyoshi*, n.p.
43. Myers and Wolf both recognized the yin-yang design of the drum, but neither associated the cow with Japanese folk toys nor identified the drum as a folk toy. Myers, "Independent Creations: Kuniyoshi's Ink Drawings of 1921–25," in *Shores of a Dream*, 58, calls the baby "Asian"; Goodrich wrote that Kuniyoshi's "children with their big heads and almond eyes have a decided Oriental character and at the same time a strong early American flavor" (*Kuniyoshi*, 17).
44. Royall Tyler, *Japanese Tales* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), xxix–xxx.
45. See *Japan: An Illustrated Encyclopedia* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1993), s.v. "den den taiko." The entry notes that *den den taiko* were popular in the seventeenth century and that their "shape is modeled after the 'fuitsuzumi,' which is a type of drum used in *bugaku*."
46. Yanigida Kunio, *Japanese Manners and Customs in the Meiji Era* (Tokyo: Obunsha, 1957), 209.
47. See Lea Batten, *Playthings and Pastimes* (Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1995).
48. "Little boy, you are a good boy," from Kasho Machida and Kenji Asano, eds., *Warabeuta* [Nursery Rhymes] (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1962, 1989), located and translated in 2003 for the author by Professor Keiko Wells, Ritsumeikan University. I wish to thank several of my Japanese friends, including Keiko Wells, who patiently answered my persistent queries about this drum, which I recognized as a folk toy from my travels in Japan. Others, including Ushio and Noriko Shinohara, Teruo and Yoko Fujieda, and Tetsuya Oshima, first told me that there was a song about it, that it appeared in *ukiyo-e*, and then sent me my own examples of the drum and other folk toys.
49. Lloyd Goodrich, unpublished notes after interview with Yasuo Kuniyoshi, 6 January 1948, Whitney artists' records, microfilm reel N670, frame 52.
50. Nisizawa, *Folk Toys*, 39. We recall that "small pox" originated as "cow pox"; see also [www.calacademy.org/research/anthropology/japanese](http://www.calacademy.org/research/anthropology/japanese).
51. For this exact toy, see Misako Shishido, *The Folk Toys of Japan* (Rutland, Vt.: Japan Publications Trading Co., 1963), 55. For other Japanese folk-toy animals on wheels, see Nisizawa, *Folk Toys*, 39, 55, 62, 66, 77.
52. Kuniyoshi, "East to West," 75–77. In current explications of the Japanese zodiac, "cow" is usually translated as "ox."
53. Goodrich, *Kuniyoshi*, 16. Ozawa, *Kuniyoshi Yasuo*, 81, has suggested that Kuniyoshi might have depicted cows as he recalled them from Okayama Prefecture.
54. See Mayer, *Guide to the Japanese Folk Tale*, for more recently collected folk tales. See also similar themes and animals in the medieval tales collected and translated by Tyler in *Japanese Tales*.

55. Mayer, *Guide to the Japanese Folk Tale*, 106–107, 184, 266, 362.
56. Yanagita Kunio, "About Folk Tales," in Mayer, *Guide to the Japanese Folk Tale*, xix. There are earlier traditional tales in Japan that were written down; see, for example, Tyler, *Japanese Tales*.
57. Myers, "Independent Creations," 61.
58. Wolf, "Kuniyoshi in the Early 1920s," in Myers and Wolf, *Shores of a Dream*, 26. Such interests on Kuniyoshi's part were documented by Goodrich, notes from an unpublished interview with Kuniyoshi, 5 February 1948, Whitney artists' records, microfilm reel N670, frame 82.
59. Wolf, "Kuniyoshi in the Early 1920s," 26.
60. See Mayer, *Guide to the Japanese Folk Tale*, 35, 37, 64, 120.
61. *Ibid.*, 63, 74, 75, and 79 discuss dreams; 92–93 shows an example of a monster.
62. Tyler, *Japanese Tales*, 1.
63. *Ibid.*
64. Wolf, "Kuniyoshi in the Early 1920s," 35. There is also a relationship to the devil, a favorite motif depicted in *Otsu-e* in the eighteenth century, which Yanagi praised as "Japan's *Min-ga* (peoples' paintings). See Kyoko Utsumi Mimura, "Soetsu Yanagi and the Legacy of the Unknown Craftman," *Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* (1994): 223.
65. Wolf, "Kuniyoshi in the Early 1920s," 35, convincingly discussed the painter's depiction of Japanese sea imagery and the influence of the work of the nineteenth-century artist Utagawa Kuniyoshi on him.
66. Kuniyoshi, "East to West," 77.
67. Seifu Shimizu, *Unai No Tomo* (Kyoto, Japan: Naosaburo Yamada, 1913), vol. 5, eighth plate from the beginning.
68. Sara Mazo Kuniyoshi, interview conducted by Gail Levin, 28 January 2002.
69. Henry McBride, "Yasuo Kuniyoshi's Paintings on View in Daniel Gallery," *New York Herald*, 13 January 1924.
70. Martha Candler Cheney, *Modern Art in America* (New York: Whitesley House, 1939), 92.
71. See *Girl at the Table* (1918); *Bananas, Still Life with Bananas and Still Life* (1920); *Still Life* (1921); and *Bananas and Plums* (1926). The theme was significant enough that Kuniyoshi took it up again in 1950 in *Forbidden Fruit*, which depicted a boy looking longingly at slices of watermelon. See Myers, "Independent Creations," 64, for fruit in Japan in the Meiji era.
72. See Forbes Watson, "The All American Nineteen at the Metropolitan Museum of Art," *Arts* 16 (January 1930): 303. Watson also questioned whether Jules Pascin, a Bulgarian-born Jew, could be considered a "true American."
73. Helen A. Read, "Modern Museum's New Show," *Brooklyn Eagle*, 15 December 1929, scrapbook, Kuniyoshi papers, microfilm reel D176, frame 314.
74. Kuniyoshi, "East to West," 81.
75. Kunio, *Japanese Manners and Customs in the Meiji Era*, 209.
76. Robert Laurent, "Memories of Yas," *College Art Journal* 13 (Fall 1953): 9.
77. Whitney artists' records, microfilm reel N670, frame 17.
78. Salpeter, "Artist's Artist," 15.
79. Kuniyoshi, "East to West," 73.
80. Neumann, *America Encounters Japan*, 255.
81. See David M. Sokol, "The Founding of Artists Equity Association After World War II," *Archives of American Art Journal* 39, nos. 1–2 (1999): 21.
82. See Morris Gilbert, "Kuniyoshi, Born in Japan and Widely Traveled, Feels at Home only in New York," *New York World-Telegram*, 23 February 1940, 19.
83. Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *Atelier 9*, no. 1 (1932).
84. Ritsuko T. Ozawa, *Yasuo Kuniyoshi Museum Newsletter*, no. 21 (1 December 2002): 2.
85. Kuniyoshi to Edith Gregor Halpert, 3 August 1941, Downtown Gallery papers, Archives of American Art.
86. Yasuo Kuniyoshi, radio broadcast for the Japanese American Committee for Democracy, 15 April 1942, transcript, Whitney artists' records, microfilm reel N670, frame 115.
87. Organized by An American Group, "Artists for Victory" took place from December 1942 through February 1943.
88. Quoted in Bert Winter, "Chronology," in *Yasuo Kuniyoshi* (Tokyo: Tokyo Metropolitan Taïen Art Museum, 1989), 205.
89. For a history of carousels, see [ohoh.essortment.com/carouselhistor\\_rlgq.htm](http://ohoh.essortment.com/carouselhistor_rlgq.htm).
90. Goodrich, notes of interviews with Kuniyoshi, 19 February and 13 January 1948, Whitney artists' records, microfilm reel N670, frames 46 and 71.
91. See Mutsuko Hoshino, "Yasuo Kuniyoshi and the Cold War: Why Was the Painter a Target of Red-Baiting?," *ShikyoïEn Mergé de l'His-toire*, no. 46 (March 2003): 61.
92. Paul Jenkins, "The Gift of the Master," in *Yasuo Kuniyoshi 1889–1953 A Retrospective Exhibition* (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas, 1975), 47.
93. Kuniyoshi to Yoshie Nakata, 22 July 1949 and 11 April 1950, in "Tsuïso no Kuniyoshi [Memories of Kuniyoshi]," *Hanga Geijutsu [Art of Print]*, no. 4 (Winter 1974): 39, 41.
94. *Ibid.*, 44–45.
95. *Ibid.*, 44, Kuniyoshi to Nakata, 8 December 1950.
96. For Kuniyoshi's interest in Zen, see Weber, "Symbolic Still Lives," in *Yasuo Kuniyoshi: Artist as Photographer*, 44.
97. Quoted in Carl Ziggrosser, "The Prints of Yasuo Kuniyoshi," *Par-nassus* (February 1940): 17.
98. Yasuo Kuniyoshi, "What is an American Art," talk at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, February 1940, Whitney artists' records, microfilm reel N670, frame 17.
99. *Ibid.*, frame 18.