
In an extensively researched exploration into the identity issues surrounding Japanese American artist Yasuo Kuniyoshi and the art of the World War II era, author ShiPu Wang presents a complex artistic career shaped and transformed by war, racial tensions, and national politics. Wang is an assistant art history professor at the University of California, Merced who has published various essays on issues surrounding globalization, nationalism, and race in American art. This is his first book.

The branding of Yasuo Kuniyoshi as an "enemy alien" by the United States government during the war complicated his relationship with the country he had adopted fully as his home and source of national identity. Ironically, Kuniyoshi was a self-identified American artist who eventually found more lasting success in his birth country of Japan. Once among the elite of the American artistic canon in the 1930s and 40s, Kuniyoshi's favor diminished in subsequent decades. Underlying this shift, Wang identifies a continuing racialization inherent in an American artistic canon that has historically favored the work of European Americans over Asian Americans. However, Wang explores in depth how this conflict is also nuanced by Kuniyoshi's relationships with other artists and other influential figures, creating an intriguing and complex artistic career that transcends simple racial categories.

In some cases, the works under discussion are not illustrated, which somewhat limits the reader's ability to follow the author's argument. In general, color images, at least of the more important paintings under discussion, would have been a valuable addition to the small black and white reproductions. The organization of the five chapters is loosely chronological, describing how Kuniyoshi became an integral part of the American painting scene before World War II, and his marginalization after the war.

Generally geared towards an academic audience, this book is an important analytical addition to past Kuniyoshi studies that have focused primarily on exhibiting the artist's work, such as Richard A. Davis' 1991 book Yasuo Kuniyoshi: The Complete Graphic Work or the University of Texas at Austin's text accompanying a 1975 retrospective exhibition: Yasuo Kuniyoshi, 1889-1953. It also addresses issues beyond more specific formal analyses of the works, such as the 1996 Amon Carter Museum publication The Shores of a Dream: Yasuo Kuniyoshi's Early Work in America or Tom Wolf's Yasuo Kuniyoshi's Women (1993). It certainly contributes new insight into broader studies of ethnicity, national identity, and World War II history. It is therefore recommended for any university library collection catering to history and political science studies as well as art and art history. It would be valuable to a museum library focusing on Asian American art as well as art movements of the mid-twentieth century.

Heather Kline, Registrar, Nedra Matteucci Galleries, Santa Fe, New Mexico, heather9387@yahoo.com