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Sadakichi Hartmann’s American Art: Citizenship, Asian America, and Critical Resistance

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Sadakichi Hartmann’s (1867–1944) 258-page autobiography was never published. It begins with his birth to a Japanese mother and German father “around 1867 or 1869” near Nagasaki, Japan. He describes his education in Germany and eventual migration to Philadelphia in an “apprenticeship in the Academy of Hard Knocks,” his friendship with Walt Whitman in the 1880s, and subsequent decades spent working on both coasts as a playwright, journalist, art critic, poet, artist, and Hollywood fixture.¹ Hartmann mused no fewer than twenty-five titles for his memoir, including:

The Wandering Gentile, Lao Tse II, Sadakichi’s *Kampf*, A Bastard Makes Good, Success in Failure, The Great Art Laugh, Slightly Superior People, A Grey Chrysanthemum, The Dancing Iconoclast, Mining Through Life, The Man Who Does (as he pleases), . . . Ex-King of Greenwich Village, The Last Bohemian, A Christ Without Disciples, The Man who Has Seen Death, Man Behind the Mask, A Wonderful Minstrel He, Visitor from Another World, The First Eurasian, Ghost of Many Incarnations, False Prophet, Mr. Quixote, Singular Without a Plural, Calvin in Disguise.²

The titles give a sense of him as a humorist, wordsmith, and poet; a mixed-race Asian American bohemian; and a sarcastic, politically inclined aesthete and proto-Beat. When interest in Hartmann resurged in the 1970s, Beat poet Kenneth Rexroth characterized him as “court magician to two generations of American intellectuals,” perhaps a nod to Hartmann’s role as a magician in the 1924 film *The Thief of Bagdad*.³

Hartmann was also one of the first historians and champions of the study of American art. On his fifty-second birthday he compiled a list of his best qualities: “Fourteen Points in Sadakichi’s Favor.” The third and fourth points were “He is our veteran art critic and champion of American art” and “He has written the first history of American art.”⁴ These American art-related bullets were preceded only by “He has been a great sinner in the eyes of the world” and “He is celebrating his fiftieth birthday in November 1919, according to the Japanese calendar.”⁵ Hartmann was not alone in recognizing his contributions: contemporary newspapers referred to him as the “foremost American art critic.”⁶

Hartmann pursued a lifelong interest in critiquing, supporting, and developing a national American art. This interest was expressed in his significant critical writings (including in *Camera Work*), numerous lectures and articles, and his authorship of one of the field’s first surveys, his two-volume *A History of American Art* (1901). In a 1906 letter, he wrote, “As

you may know, I have been a champion of American Art all my life, and I now would like to carry the message to all parts of the country, to stir up to the public and to induce them to take on an actual and immediate interest in Native and local art. I intend to devote my annual lecture tour largely to my 'Plea for American Art.'"⁷

Drawing upon Hartmann's archive at the University of California, Riverside, I argue that Hartmann's early critical writings on American art, as well as his essays on Orientalism and Japanese influences on the art of the United States and Europe, show a foundational relationship between the establishment of American art history as a discipline and Asian American experience. One of the first critics and historians of American art, Hartmann's early discourses on a national American art were shaped by his experience as a mixed-race immigrant during the Asian Exclusion period.

Hartmann was writing before the history of American art became a professionalized academic field. His 1901 survey is the earliest survey of note cited by Wanda Corn in "Coming of Age: Historical Scholarship in American Art."⁸ Corn characterizes the question of the "Americanness of American art" as integral to the origins of the field as it professionalized from the 1930s into the 1960s, though she notes that "younger generations are embarrassed by the insistent nationalism" of this earlier school of Americanists.⁹ She explains that such a "mode of discourse had its beginnings in the years around World War I, when a number of cultural critics . . . began to think about what was inherently national and 'American' about American art and letters."¹⁰

Already in the late nineteenth century, Hartmann was helping to construct the early parameters of American art in national terms, but his conception was not embarrassingly nationalist; rather, it was shaped by the logic of immigration and naturalization. He conceived of American character in art as not necessarily inborn in an artist, but cultivated through choices like the rejection of Europe and embrace of regional authenticity. Further, his writing on Japanese art and its influence on American art contributed an Asian Americanist perspective to early critical discourse.

Compared to Hartmann's more robust presence in accounts of modernism, he is relatively absent from the historiography of American art, perhaps due to his racialization during the Asian Exclusion and Japanese internment periods.¹¹ Hartmann's free-spiritedness helps explain his afterlife as a symbol of artistic and intellectual liberation. Posthumously dubbed the "first hippie" in 1969, Hartmann offers a model of poetic critical resistance, connecting the early period of American art to Asian American consciousness movements.¹²

"A Plea for American Art": Cultivating Citizenship through American Art

The everlasting complaint is: There is no atmosphere in America. Pshaw!

—Sadakichi Hartmann, "A National American Art"

Hartmann immigrated to the United States in 1882 when he was fifteen years old, stating in his autobiography: "Came to the States on a hot June day with a capital of three dollars. Law of non-admittance of minors not yet in force."¹³ The year Hartmann immigrated from

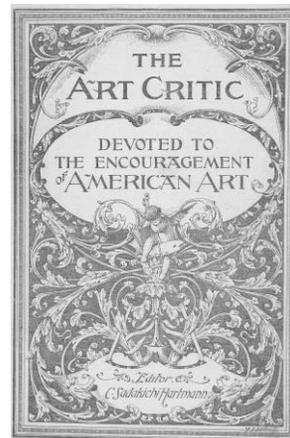
Germany also marked the enactment of the Chinese Exclusion Act. Hartmann’s mention of the law in relation to his immigration story suggests some level of awareness that he essentially slipped through the cracks—not just as a minor but also as a person of Japanese descent.

In a timeline of life events in Hartmann’s autobiography, he types for 1894: “First exhibition of pastels. Author practices painting as an amateur. About 450 pictures have won the distinction of being ‘Sold.’” And then in a handwritten notation: “Became a U.S.A. citizen 12 Oct.”¹⁴ Hartmann’s handwritten insertion, like the note about the law of minors, is a moment of archival revelation that shows some tenuousness about this event, which had been left off the typewritten account.

Federal law racially restricted naturalization until 1952.¹⁵ Naturalization was historically limited to white people (with the addition of people of African descent in 1870; Indigenous people in 1940; and people of Chinese descent in 1943). Decisions were made informally, and petitions from people of Asian descent were often rejected.¹⁶ Some sued to be considered legally white (almost entirely unsuccessfully).¹⁷ In 1894, the year of Hartmann’s naturalization, a court held that Japanese people were not white; courts decided in 1909 and 1912 that people of half-Asian and half-white descent were not white.¹⁸ Legal scholar Leti Volpp explains, “For more than a century and a half, Asian Americans were barred from naturalization; and they continue to be viewed as a group whose loyalty to America remains in doubt.”¹⁹

While Hartmann might not have been eligible to be naturalized in 1894, he may have passed as white to obtain his status. As American Studies scholar Stacy Nojima discovered, Hartmann was listed as “White” on his marriage certificate to wed Elizabeth Blanche Walsh in 1891.²⁰ He also might have obtained citizenship through luck—as some immigrants during periods of restrictive immigration policy have. Hartmann’s 1894 naturalization application lists his occupation as “journalist,” and his name, transcribed as “Carl Sadakechi Hartman,” contains two misspellings (fig. 1).²¹

| | | | |
|---|---|---------------------|----------|
| Family Name | HARTMAN | Given Name or Names | H. G. S. |
| Title and Location of Court | MUNICIPAL COURT, NEW YORK COUNTY, | | |
| Date of Naturalization | OCT 12, 1894 | | |
| Address of Naturalized Person | 356 W. 43 ST NYC. | | |
| Occupation | JOURNALIST | | |
| Port of Arrival in the United States | NY NY | | |
| Former Nationality | EMPEROR OF JAPAN | | |
| Names, Addresses and Occupations of Witnesses to Naturalization | 1 ELIZABETH B. HARTMAN - 356 W. 43 ST NYC 2 JUNA B. HARTMAN - 356 W. 43 ST NYC | | |



Figs. 1, 2. Left: Sadakichi Hartmann’s application for naturalization, 1894. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC; right: Cover of *The Art Critic* 1, no. 1 (November 1893)

This prologue about Sadakichi’s path to citizenship in the era of Asian Exclusion provides a context for his approach to American art. The year before obtaining citizenship, Hartmann—living in Boston after several years in Paris—was making his first foray into the American art world, producing his short-lived periodical, *The Art Critic* (fig. 2). Its three volumes, released in 1893 and 1894, enjoyed a readership of 750 subscribers, including

Albert Bierstadt, William Merritt Chase, Thomas Wilmer Dewing August St. Gaudens, Childe Hassam, and Albert Pinkham Ryder.²² The cover, decorated with a baroque pattern surrounding a cherub with a palette, included the subtitle: "Dedicated to the Encouragement of American Art." It is a striking visual counterpart to Hartmann's naturalization application of the same year: one a government document, inked with the numbers and letters of bureaucracy, with little regard for the correct spelling of his Japanese or German names; the other an intricate web of ornamentation, a lithographed version of a chapel to American art, emblazoned with the script "Editor C. Sadakichi Hartmann." While the tone of these two documents could not be more different, both are endowed with national significance.

The first *Art Critic* issue proclaims it is for readers "who deem the encouragement of American Art by an annual support from the United States Government necessary, or desirable at the least."²³ The first article by Hartmann, "An Appeal to All Art Lovers," sets out his concept of a national art for the American melting pot: "America, employed in the tremendous task of building up a new race from the waste of other nations, of transforming this conglomeration into a nation of useful, self supporting citizens . . ." ²⁴ He implores Americans to be patriots and appreciate art, referencing examples from Fra Angelico to Chinese ivory carvings, suggesting we "develop a race" to produce great artists. "Let us belong, if we will, to different creeds, entertain different political and moral views . . . but let us be united in the one effort to render our national life richer, purer, and more powerful by giving to it a National Art."²⁵ He also included in the issue a treatise titled "How an American Art Could Be Developed": a plan to establish an American art guild, National Art Gallery, Academy of Fine Arts, and National Museum of Fine Arts.²⁶

Lauren Kroiz argues that Hartmann's writing about photography (for which he is best known) borrowed terms from debates about assimilation and pluralism: "Arguments about immigration paralleled contemporaneous debates among the advocates of photography."²⁷ This language of immigration and pluralism also entered into his discussions of American art, as in his formulation of America as a "conglomeration." Kroiz deftly argues that modernist debates of the Stieglitz circle should be understood in the political context of the era of Chinese Exclusion—a point that I extend to Hartmann's contributions to the development of a national American art.²⁸ His interest in American art coincided with his unstable citizenship status—perhaps a kind of constructing citizenship through art criticism.

In another *Art Critic* essay, "Who Are Our American Artists?," Hartmann notes that "foreign artists who have settled in the states belong to us" and "becoming American citizens and adopting local habits they gradually take a genuine interest in the artistic development of this country and are perhaps its strongest pioneers."²⁹ In an essay in the final issue, "A National American Art," he suggests artists can develop Americanness by rejecting Europe and cultivating a regional American character: "Have we no flowers in America? Are not our women Beautiful? Art not the sorrows and joys of human life very much the same o'er the world?"³⁰ He lists artists he believes are "working, perhaps unconsciously, at the development of a national art."³¹ Among them he lists wood engravers, American illustrators (a prescient interest of Hartmann's that persists in our field), the Hudson River School, and Bierstadt. He champions American subject matter, such as the Rocky Mountains, Long Island, and Yellowstone. He suggests that artists read Nathaniel Hawthorne and Hartmann's mentor, "that great democratic spirit" Walt Whitman.³²

Hartmann's thinking about nativism and American identity was shaped by his formative friendship with Whitman—about which Hartmann wrote in *Conversations with Walt Whitman* (1895), dedicated to Thomas Eakins. Written in 1894, the year Hartmann was naturalized, the book is a transcription of his discussions with Whitman (with editorializing commentary). The introduction explains that a Philadelphia bookseller advised Hartmann to visit the elderly Whitman in Camden, New Jersey:

Sadakichi: "I would like to see Walt Whitman."

Whitman: "That's my name. And you are a Japanese boy, are you not?"
(Except very small boys the only person I met in those years who recognized my nationality at the first glance.)

Sadakichi: "My father is a German, but my mother was a Japanese and I was born in Japan."

Whitman: "H'm — Come in."³³

While their conversations were wide-ranging—covering Lincoln, Washington, poetry, literature, and art—Hartmann did not escape racialization by Whitman. In fact, Whitman dismissed Hartmann's ability to understand American character fully: "There are so many traits, characteristics, Americanisms, inborn with us, which you would never get at. One can do a great deal of propping. After all one can't grow roses on a peach tree."³⁴ American literature scholar Andrew Way Leong notes that Whitman was "precluding Hartmann from ever getting at the Americanisms necessary . . . of a critic who could fight for a national literature that would embody the realities of experience in America," expressing "a noxious form of exclusionary American nativism."³⁵ Hartmann's writings on American art may be haunted by this nativist dismissal by his great American teacher.³⁶

In Hartmann's conception, Americanness could be obtained by birth, devotion, or both—not unlike citizenship.³⁷ Hartmann often described himself as an "American by choice."³⁸ He promoted American regionalism in his lectures. A 1907 newspaper story titled "MAKES PLEA FOR LOCAL ART: Sadakichi Hartman [sic] Says There is Material Here—No Need of Going Abroad" goes on to say: "Rebuking the so-called American painter who contends he must go to Europe for the true artistic atmosphere and pleading for the greater development of American national art, Sadakichi Hartman [sic], German-Japanese writer, painter, and poet, lectured to a most attentive audience last night . . . 'Let Wisconsin artists paint Wisconsin,' said the lecturer."³⁹ In 1908, the *Pittsburgh Dispatch* claimed "Hartman [sic] declares each state is developing 'types' peculiarly their own" and explained, "He said that in his opinion the great development of American art will come when art students and artists are able to devote their talents to their own section of country and each idealizes and portrays his own section, as only a native can."⁴⁰ For Hartmann, devoting oneself to a place was a method of achieving Americanness.

American Art, Loyalty, and the Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype

Whitman was not alone in suggesting that Hartmann was not American enough to define American art. Hartmann received pushback against his writing. In fact, *The Art Critic* folded because Hartmann was jailed in Boston on charges of obscenity for his erotic play



Fig. 3. Scrapbook clipping, "Art Critic Would Fight Native Land," *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, c. 1906, "Revelations' Scrapbook," Sadakichi Hartmann papers, Special Collections & University Archives, University of California, Riverside

Christ; his legal defense left him bankrupt.⁴¹ Reception of Hartmann's American art survey and lectures was tinged with racial curiosity, and some critics were openly hostile. A *New York Times* review of his survey, titled "American Artists: A Foreigner's View of our Painters and Sculptors," compared him to a child taking notes.⁴² Philadelphia illustrator Joseph Pennell expressed his criticism through a racist trope of the feminized Asian man: "Mr., Mrs., or Miss Sadakichi Hartmann—it is difficult to recognize the sex in the name or the work—begins with the very beginning of the white man's art in America. . . . I am afraid this author draws his historical line with the colour line." Pennell complained that Hartmann suggested that Benjamin West learned to mix paint from the Cherokee Indians and does not attribute Henry Ossawa Tanner's success to his race. Perhaps this is what Hartmann refers to in a handwritten note in his scrapbook of clippings: "The criticism of my History of American Art alone would have filled the volume."⁴³

In the eyes of some white artists and critics, and even Whitman, Hartmann's race precluded him from being an arbiter of Americanness—assigning him perpetual foreigner status. As sociologist Mia Tuan writes, "Whiteness . . . is equated with being American; Asianness is not. And because Asianness is not, questions regarding their loyalty to this country are raised."⁴⁴ Philosophizing on how artists could convey their devotion to their country was not hypothetical

for Hartmann, whose loyalty was questioned throughout his life. For example, an interview with Hartmann was published following a 1906 order in San Francisco forcing Japanese and Korean students into segregated "Oriental schools"—straining US-Japan relations.⁴⁵ It reads: "Japanese art student talks of War politics and pictures. Art critic would fight native land. Sadakichi Hartmann says he would side with United States against Japan," and goes on: "He is a naturalized American, and says he considers this country his."⁴⁶ An accompanying photograph shows Hartmann dressed in a suit and glasses; Nojima argues this look and his pen name, Sidney Allen, was a performance of whiteness for the Stieglitz circle (fig. 3).⁴⁷ Perhaps to illustrate Hartmann's race, the photograph is framed with drawings of Asian motifs: a temple, a buddha-like figure, a horizontal landscape, and flowers. Hartmann says he is familiar with the "'situation' with the Japanese pupils" and then pivots: "From a discussion of Japanese-American relations Sadakichi drifted into discussion of American art."⁴⁸

This article presages Hartmann's fate in the Internment period. After years in the east coast art worlds of Philadelphia, Boston, and New York's Greenwich Village, Hartmann relocated to California in the 1910s, and in 1923 he moved to the San Geronio Pass, a desert valley between Los Angeles and the Coachella Valley. As a Japanese American in California after Pearl Harbor, Hartmann was investigated by the FBI for activities of "un-Americanism."⁴⁹ FBI reports from 1943 describe his parentage, personal life, travels, and professional activities; friends testify that Hartmann and his family are "loyal, patriotic Americans."⁵⁰

Hartmann’s writings on the character of American art haunt these documents. The FBI agents cast doubt on them: “Subject’s occupation is a writer. He claims to have written a book entitled ‘History of American Art.’” This racialized policing of Hartmann’s writing about American art began with critics and artists ended with federal law enforcement.⁵¹

American art was also Hartmann’s self-defense. In a memo written by Hartmann in the FBI papers, he makes the case that he “can not be classified as a Japanese or alien enemy.” His reasons read like a poem:

as I was never a Japanese citizen
 as I resided in Japan only as an infant in the foreign colony of Desima
 as I do not speak the language
 as I never visited the country afterwards
 as I have not association with Japanese abroad or in this country

He points out that he was naturalized, discusses discrepancies in his biography, and concludes with this “Item of interest”:

I wrote the first generally accepted History of American Art—it is not likely that an alien enemy would devote ten years of his life to such a task. During my entire career I pleaded for the encouragement of American Art, and made every effort to convince European [sic] nations that the U.S.A. has a national art worth while—after all a patriotic endeavor of educational value!⁵²

Hartmann’s early writings on American art read through watershed periods of anti-Asian racist policy, during which he managed to attain citizenship and avoid internment—perhaps owing to his mixed or sometimes white-passing status. His daughter Wistaria Linton thought he avoided incarceration because of his work on American art, explaining in 1971, “My dad had become a naturalized citizen in 1894 and, when the FBI interviewed him, he could only affirm again and again that his lifelong devotion to American art and literature was the best evidence of his patriotism. . . . And I guess the FBI believed him.”⁵³ Although he avoided internment, Hartmann moved to a shack on the Morongo Indian Reservation (where his daughter lived) in 1938 and died a year after the investigation, in 1944. Hartmann’s racial profiling in the 1940s and the racist reception of his work—even among his strongest allies—is vital context for understanding his comparatively minor status in American art scholarship, which others have attributed to his “eccentricity.”⁵⁴ He looms larger in accounts of modernism, a field less constrained by questions of national identity. Situating him in the context of American and Asian American history, we see his reception and omission more clearly.

Although Hartmann’s presence is lacking in historiography, he is overrepresented in art. A list in his archive catalogues fifty-seven artists who depicted him, including Dewing, Marius De Zayas, Gertrude Käsebier, George Luks, Edward Steichen, and Edward Weston.⁵⁵ Among those in public collections (but not on view) are Ejnar Hansen’s *Portrait of Sadakichi Hartmann* (fig. 4). It shows a pensive Hartmann in a thinking cap, gazing out a window over a book, conveying Hansen’s fondness for his friend. Another by Ben Berlin, *Portrait of Sadakichi Hartmann*, is perhaps the best visual metaphor for the glittering and multifaceted Hartmann, whose hyper-angular face is refracted multiple times in Berlin’s kaleidoscopic vision (fig. 5). Among the many photographs taken of him is one of a young Hartmann in 1898 by Zaida Ben-Yusuf (fig. 6), now in the National Portrait Gallery. Lisa

Mintz Messinger, former Associate Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, attributed artistic interest in Hartmann to his personality.⁵⁶ Some (though not all) of these images betray an unsavory racial fascination at best, or racial caricature at worst (see, for example, fig. 7). But the sheer number of representations of Hartmann make his presence in American art undeniable.



Figs. 4, 5. Left: Ejnar Hansen, *Portrait of Sadakichi Hartmann*, before 1934. Oil on canvas, 51 1/8 x 41 1/8 in. Los Angeles County Museum of Art; digital image © 2021 Museum Associates / LACMA. Licensed by Art Resource, NY; right: Ben Berlin, *Portrait of Sadakichi Hartmann*, 1934. Pastel on brown fiberboard, 61 3/8 x 31 5/8 in. The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC



Figs. 6, 7. Left: Zaida Ben-Yusuf, *Carl Sadakichi Hartmann*, 1898. Platinum print, 4 1/8 x 7 1/4 in. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; right: John Decker, *Portrait of Sadakichi Hartmann*, n.d. Sadakichi Hartmann papers, Special Collections & University Archives, University of California, Riverside

"The Art of Omission": An Asian Americanist Critique

Hartmann's pastel *Moonrise San Jacinto*. A *Japanese Print* depicts the California landscape of his home in the San Geronio pass (fig. 8). In the jewel-like landscape, striations of blue, green, and dark brown foreground a pink sky and the moonrise of the title. It is emblematic of his philosophy that American artists should depict their local surroundings. In a poem accompanying the pastel, Hartmann implores: "Why stray to foreign lands when you have at your door a garden that crept out of arid sands and yon mountain there—marvel of volcanic art: San Jacinto's dauntless soar, a white pyramid two miles above the desert's floor, vast, serene, symbol of the vernal scene!"⁵⁷ Hartmann's titular evocation of the Japanese woodblock print indicates his interest in his country of birth, a visual corollary to his critical exploration of the influence of Japan on Anglo American artists.



Fig. 8. Sadakichi Hartmann, *Moonrise San Jacinto*. A *Japanese Print*, c. 1923–1944. Pastel on paper, 7 7/8 x 11 5/8 in. The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC

Hartmann was poised uniquely as an Asian American critic to receive the fin-de-siècle Japonisme of the white European and American avant-garde. As Hartmann explored the



Fig. 9. Portrait of Sadakichi Hartmann wearing an ornate robe, as he appeared as a lecturer and entertainer at the Hotel Vendome, Boston, 1889. Sadakichi Hartmann papers, Special Collections & University Archives, University of California, Riverside

boundaries of American art, he—like so many Asian American artists and critics—also contended with the forces of Orientalism, or the fetishization by white western artists of a fantasy of “the Orient.” Through his self-fashioning, Hartmann engaged with the orientalist appetite. His writings reveal a conviction to identify the indebtedness of American and European modernism to Japanese sources. This constitutes a notable Asian American contribution to the discourse of modernism’s orientalist and primitivist approach to Japanese art.

The professionalization of art criticism in the late nineteenth century, of which Hartmann was a part, coincided with the height of Japonisme.⁵⁸ Literary scholar Grace E. Lavery explains how Hartmann’s perceived “quaintness” and “eccentricity” were a racialized microcosm of “how *Japan* was treated by Western thinkers at a far larger scale.”⁵⁹ Similarly, Stacy Nojima has argued that Hartmann participated in “self-Orientalism” or “self-tropicalization,” engaging in a self-conscious performance of his race, as in an 1889 photograph of him in “Mikado garb” (fig. 9).⁶⁰ Perhaps the best example of Hartmann’s self-Orientalizing was his proto-performance art “Perfume Concerts,” in which he conjured a distant place through recitation of a travel monologue while floral fragrances were blown at the

audience.⁶¹ But as Lavery explains, "nineteenth-century Japanese writers and artists were keenly aware that their fetishization by Western aesthetes was somewhat of a poisoned chalice."⁶²

Hartmann brought a critical conviction to his writings on the status of Japanese art within the aesthetic movement. After publishing *A History of American Art* (1901), Hartmann published *Japanese Art* (1903). Both discuss Japanese art's foundational influence on modernism. In *American Art*, Hartmann argues that Mary Cassatt, Arthur B. Davies, Arthur Wesley Dow, J. Alden Weir, and several other American painters apply principles of Japanese art,⁶³ which he expands upon in *Japanese Art* in the chapter "The Influence of Japanese Art on Western Civilization":

The Japanese influence is naturally most evident in painting; in the nocturnes of Whistler; in Manet's ambition to see things flat; in the peculiar space composition of Degas, Skarbina and the German secessionists, and the poster painters; . . . the parallelism of horizontal lines in D.W. Tryon's landscapes. . . . Nearly two-thirds of all painters who have become prominent during the last twenty years have learnt, in one instance or another, from the Japanese.⁶⁴

Hartmann's chapter is a notable origin point for critiques of a white modernist "discovery" of Japanese woodblock prints and aesthetic principles like flatness.⁶⁵

Hartmann expands his theory of Japanese influence on western art in his *The Whistler Book* (1910), in a striking chapter titled "The Art of Omission." Hartmann argues that Whistler's nocturnes are groundbreaking not for subject matter or technical perfection but for their "art of omission" or "suggestiveness"⁶⁶—a term he had coined in *The History of American Art* to describe a composition of distilled, poetic elements, derived from Japanese art:

[Whistler] probably wished to remain under cover and not come out and boldly say: 'This is the Japanese way of doing things. I disengage the poetical significance from an object or fact in Eastern fashion. I have learned this from the Hiroshige prints.' Few artists are willing to lay bare the mechanics of their individual way of interpretation.⁶⁷

Hartmann's chapter title is a double entendre, referring both to Whistler's omission of extraneous compositional elements (the vaunted, perceived simplicity of Japanese art) and to Whistler's omission of citing his Japanese sources. In acknowledging Whistler's tacit appropriation, Hartmann is in conversation with discourse from nearly a century later: a 2009 essay by art historian Bert Winther-Tamaki argues that Abstract Expressionists, including Mark Tobey and Franz Kline, denied that their work was inspired by calligraphy, a deliberate obfuscation ("Asian denial") of midcentury orientalism.⁶⁸

Hartmann is matter-of-fact about Whistler's takings. He writes about Whistler's *Nocturne: Blue and Gold—Old Battersea Bridge* (fig. 10):

If anybody ever plagiarized ideas it was Whistler. The "T" shape of the 'Old Battersea Bridge,' in his nocturne of blue and gold, is almost an exact copy of a Hiroshige design. The same can be said of the branch of leaves protruding like a silhouette from the margin of his 'Ocean,' and the composition of

several other nocturnes. But Whistler added something which no Japanese print suggests. He added light, atmosphere, distance and mystery.⁶⁹

While Hartmann does not identify the exact print, he was probably thinking of Hiroshige’s *Bamboo Yards, Kyobashi* (fig. 11). He mentions that Hiroshige prints are visible in other Whistler paintings and that Whistler is better than the average artist who follows “the Eastern trail of art.”⁷⁰



Figs. 10, 11. Left: James Abbott McNeill Whistler, *Nocturne: Blue and Gold—Old Battersea Bridge*, c. 1872–75. Oil on canvas, 26 7/8 x 20 1/4 in. Tate, Presented by the Art Fund 1905; Photo © Tate; right: Hiroshige Andō, *Bamboo Yards, Kyobashi*, 1857. Color woodcut print, 13 1/4 x 8 1/2 in. Library of Congress

Hartmann’s impulse to give credit where credit is due—a turn-of-the-century callout—is a notable Asian Americanist move. English scholar Audrey Wu Clark has reclaimed Hartmann as an Asian Americanist (in contrast with his exclusion from an 1974 anthology of Asian American writers on the grounds that he “said nothing about Asian America”).⁷¹ In this vein, Hartmann’s writings about orientalist impulses in American art deconstruct modernist aesthetics from an Asian American perspective.

Asian American Psychedelic

A pastel by Hartmann shows a mystical landscape (fig. 12). Three Davies-like figures float across a landscape toward a temple in the distance, like Dorothy and her sidekicks approaching the Emerald City. A seated Buddha floats in the sky, in a halo of concentric purple, pink, and white (recalling Hartmann’s 1897 absurdist religious drama, *Buddha*). A review of another Hartmann pastel illuminates this one: “It is luminous and small. . . . Its glow is remarkable. . . . In Mr. Hartmann’s pictures, as in his writing, there is the unmistakable expression of a unique personality, of a strong and myriad jeweled imagination.”⁷² Adding this picture to what we know of Hartmann’s discussions of Japanese

art, and his conceptual performances like the Perfume Concert, we might see this pastel pink floating orb Buddha as a kind of Asian American psychedelia.



Fig. 12. Sadakichi Hartmann, *A Buddha In The Sky*, n.d. Pastel on paper, 8 1/2 x 11 5/8 in. The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC

This radical or psychedelic valence of Hartmann may be what led to his “rediscovery” by scholars in the late 1960s, perhaps spurred by his characterization as an aged, drunken Bohemian in journalist Gene Fowler’s 1954 Hollywood exposé, *Minutes of the Last Meeting*. University of California, Riverside Professor George Knox and historian Harry Lawton worked with Hartmann’s daughter to unearth Hartmann’s archive and publish *White Chrysanthemums* (1971), a book of Hartmann’s “literary fragments and pronouncements,” with a quote on the cover by the “Father of the Beats,” Kenneth Rexroth, describing Hartmann as “the court magician to two generations of American intellectuals.” Hartmann’s re-emergence in the counterculture may also relate to literary scholar Josephine Nock-Hee Park’s concept of “Beatific Orientalism.”⁷³

A 1969 article titled “The First Hippie” begins: “He was an aging German-Japanese moocher, but he knew he was king—even if no one else did!”⁷⁴ Hartmann’s humor, defiant individuality, and bombastic writings contested the essentializing forces with which he contended. He is an early model of Asian American resistance. In *White Chrysanthemums*, in a section titled “Races and the Melting Pot,” Hartmann is quoted: “May there not come a time when China and Japan will operate together: the Yellow Peril against the White Barbarian?”⁷⁵ Hartmann’s startlingly early reclamation of “Yellow Peril” seems absolutely fitting for 1971, two years after a man next to Richard Aoki at a Black Panthers rally held a sign reading “Yellow Peril Supports Black Power.”

Hartmann’s writings offer a kind of a critical defiance: it was a political act for him to make himself arbiter of that which was American during periods when his citizenship and Americanness were contested. His commitment to acknowledging Japanese influences on modernism was a method of revealing “the art of omission” and the Orientalism of white modernists. His signature free-spiritedness, which has been interpreted in racialized terms as eccentricity, is instead a model of poetic resistance. [Archival footage of Hartmann](#) dancing signifies a liberated body, spirit, and double consciousness, both of and ahead of his time.

Notes

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- ¹ "Sadakichi Hartmann's Autobiography," c. 1940, box 1, Sadakichi Hartmann papers (MSO68), Special Collections & University Archives, University of California, Riverside (hereafter Sadakichi Hartmann papers).
- ² Sadakichi Hartmann, *White Chrysanthemums: Literary Fragments and Pronouncements*, ed. George Knox and Harry W. Lawton (New York: Herder & Herder, n.d.), 30.
- ³ Hartmann, *White Chrysanthemums*, cover.
- ⁴ Hartmann, *White Chrysanthemums*, 32.
- ⁵ Hartmann, *White Chrysanthemums*, 32.
- ⁶ "Mr. Hartmann Finds Recreation in Writing," *Buffalo Times*, December 5, 1910; "'Revelations' Scrapbook," Sadakichi Hartmann papers; "Shirlaw Exhibition at Art Gallery," n.d., Sadakichi Hartmann papers; "'Revelations' Scrapbook," Sadakichi Hartmann papers.
- ⁷ Typed letter signed by Sadakichi Hartmann about his lecture tour on American art, 1906, offered on amazon.com by Blue Mountain Books & Manuscripts, accessed May 17, 2021, <https://www.amazon.com/LETTER-SADAKICHI-HARTMANN-LECTURE-AMERICAN/dp/B01CQ57ZAY>.
- ⁸ Wanda M. Corn, "Coming of Age: Historical Scholarship in American Art," *The Art Bulletin* 70, no. 2 (June 1988): 189, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3051116>.
- ⁹ Corn, "Coming of Age," 192.
- ¹⁰ Corn, "Coming of Age," 192.
- ¹¹ In her edited volume of Hartmann's writings, Jane Calhoun Weaver addresses Hartmann's absence from American art historiography and writes, "Few writers were as important to the art of the United States at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century as Sadakichi Hartmann. . . . A reading of the 1890–1915 era in American art is virtually impossible without recourse to Hartmann's writings." Jane Calhoun Weaver, ed., *Sadakichi Hartmann: Critical Modernist: Collected Art Writings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 1.
- ¹² Richard Hill, "The First Hippie" (*Swank*, 1969), box 29, Sadakichi Hartmann papers.
- ¹³ "Sadakichi Hartmann's Autobiography," Sadakichi Hartmann papers.
- ¹⁴ "Sadakichi Hartmann's Autobiography," Sadakichi Hartmann papers.
- ¹⁵ Gabriel Jackson Chin, "A Nation of White Immigrants: State and Federal Racial Preferences for White Noncitizens," *Boston University Law Review* 100, no. 4 (September 1, 2020): 1279.
- ¹⁶ Chin, "A Nation of White Immigrants," 1279; Ian Haney-López, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race*, rev. and updated tenth anniversary ed., Critical America (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 1.
- ¹⁷ In 1878, in the first published decision on this question, a federal court in California rejected citizenship for Ah Yup, a petitioner of Chinese descent. Subsequently, courts rejected citizenship for applicants from Hawai'i, China, Japan, Burma, and the Philippines, including mixed-race applicants, but courts wavered on the "whiteness" of applicants from Syria, India, and Arabia. In the 1920s, the US Supreme Court decided in two cases that people of Japanese and Indian descent could not naturalize. Haney-López, *White by Law*, 1, 163–67.
- ¹⁸ Haney-López, *White by Law*, 1, 163–67.
- ¹⁹ Leti Volpp, "'Obnoxious To Their Very Nature': Asian Americans and Constitutional Citizenship," *Citizenship Studies* 5, no. 1 (February 2001): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13621020020025196>.

- ²⁰ Stacy Nojima, "Mixed Race Capital: Cultural Producers And Asian American Mixed Race Identity From The Late Nineteenth To Twentieth Century" (PhD diss., University of Hawai'i at Manoa, 2018), 43.
- ²¹ Sadakichi Hartmann Application for Naturalization, 1894, *Soundex Index to Petitions for Naturalizations Filed in Federal, State, and Local Courts in New York City, 1792–1906 (M1674)*, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.
- ²² Weaver, *Sadakichi Hartmann*, 2.
- ²³ Sadakichi Hartmann, "The Art Critic," *The Art Critic* 1, no. 1 (November 1893): 1–2.
- ²⁴ Sadakichi Hartmann, "An Appeal to All Art Lovers," *The Art Critic* 1, no. 1 (November 1893): 1–2.
- ²⁵ Hartmann, "An Appeal to All Art Lovers."
- ²⁶ Sadakichi Hartmann, "How an American Art Could Be Developed," *The Art Critic* 1, no. 1 (November 1893): 3–4; Weaver, *Sadakichi Hartmann*, 58. Weaver notes that Hartmann's outline for a plan for building American art institutions stemmed from his desired to become the first "Minister of Art" of the United States, all of which were likely based on Hartmann's understanding of French arts institutions.
- ²⁷ Lauren Kroiz, *Creative Composites: Modernism, Race, and the Stieglitz Circle*, The Phillips Book Prize Series 4 (Berkeley: University of California Press; and Washington, DC: The Phillips Collection, 2012), 13.
- ²⁸ Kroiz, *Creative Composites*, 4.
- ²⁹ Sadakichi Hartmann, "Who Are Our American Artists?" *The Art Critic* 1, no. 1 (November 1893): 16–17.
- ³⁰ Sadakichi Hartmann, "A National American Art," *The Art Critic* 1, no. 3 (March 1894): 46.
- ³¹ Hartmann, "A National American Art," 46.
- ³² Hartmann, "A National American Art," 47–48.
- ³³ Sadakichi Hartmann, *Conversations with Walt Whitman* (New York: E.P. Coby & Co., 1895), 6.
- ³⁴ Hartmann, *Conversations with Walt Whitman*, 8.
- ³⁵ Andrew Way Leong, "Critique Is Not That Old, Composition Is Not That New: Sadakichi Hartmann's Conversations with Walt Whitman," in *The New Walt Whitman Studies*, ed. M. Cohen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 190, [doi:10.1017/9781108296830.012](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108296830.012); also discussed in Audrey Wu Clark, "'Little Postage Stamps of Native Soil': The Modernist Haiku during Japanese Exclusion," in *The Asian American Avant-Garde: Universalist Aspirations in Modernist Literature and Art*, Asian American History and Culture (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015).
- ³⁶ Juliana Chang, in her anthology of Asian American poetry that features Hartmann, notes that Whitman once referred to Hartmann as "that damn Japanee." Juliana Chang, ed., *Quiet Fire: A Historical Anthology of Asian American Poetry, 1892–1970* (New York: The Asian American Writers' Workshop, 1996), xvi.
- ³⁷ Citizenship in the United States is granted through birth or through naturalization. Volpp, "'Obnoxious To Their Very Nature,'" 73.
- ³⁸ "Here's a Really Truly Beloved Vagabond," n.d., "'Revelations' Scrapbook," Sadakichi Hartmann papers. In a clipping from a 1907 article, the writer goes on to claim, "Hartmann's genius is distinctly American. Although his English is tinged with a quaint accent, more German than Japanese, he has the breezy manners of an American, the ready sense of humor and the point of view of the men of his adopted country. It takes an American, whether native or acclimated to understand and take in good part the 'joshing' which is rampant." "Distinguished visitor who is German-Jap by Nativity, but American by Choice, Says St. Louis is Pioneer in Culture and Art Appreciation, but that Talent Goest to Waste in America," January, 1907. "'Revelations' Scrapbook," Sadakichi Hartmann papers.
- ³⁹ "MAKES PLEA FOR LOCAL ART: Sadakichi Hartman [sic] Says There is Material Here—No Need of Going Abroad," *Sentinel*, September 1, 1907. "'Revelations' Scrapbook," Sadakichi Hartmann papers.

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- 40 "Will Be Easy To Tell Where We Are From, Says Art Authority," *The Pittsburgh Dispatch*, February 11, 1908, "Revelations' Scrapbook," Sadakichi Hartmann papers.
- 41 "Sadakichi Hartmann's Autobiography," Sadakichi Hartmann papers; Weaver, *Sadakichi Hartmann*, 3.
- 42 "American Artists: A Foreigner's View of our Painters and Sculptors," *New York Times*, June 1902, "Revelations' Scrapbook," Sadakichi Hartmann papers.
- 43 "Revelations' Scrapbook," Sadakichi Hartmann papers.
- 44 Mia Tuan, *Forever Foreigners or Honorary Whites? The Asian Ethnic Experience Today* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 198.
- 45 These schools were already attended by Chinese students; Haney-López, *White by Law*, 3.
- 46 "Art critic would fight native land," *St. Louis Dispatch*, c. 1906, "Revelations' Scrapbook," Sadakichi Hartmann papers.
- 47 Nojima, "Mixed Race Capital," 41. According to Nojima, "When lecturing on the subject of photography, Hartmann's three-piece suit, monocle, derby hat, and watch chain mimicked his performance of a white educated cultured male and served as props to support his performance as white."
- 48 "Art critic would fight native land."
- 49 "Sadakichi Hartmann FBI Reports," 1943, Sadakichi Hartmann papers.
- 50 "Sadakichi Hartmann FBI Reports," 1943, Sadakichi Hartmann papers.
- 51 Richard Meyer has discussed the FBI's file on Andy Warhol in terms of the agents' reproduction of homoerotic desire in their surveillance and description of Warhol's films. Richard Meyer, *Outlaw Representation: Censorship & Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century American Art*, Ideologies of Desire (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).
- 52 Even in this darkest kind of document, defending himself from incarceration, he seemingly could not hold himself back from concluding with an exclamation mark, adding his customary levity.
- 53 "New Interest in Works of Sadakichi Hartmann," *The San Bernardino County Sun*, May 16, 1971.
- 54 Anna Shechtman writes: "That Sadakichi Hartmann's film criticism has remained dormant in film studies may be due to the spectacular eccentricity of Hartmann's biography and bibliography." Anna Shechtman, "Sadakichi Hartmann's Moving Pictures," *MITOS MAGAZiN*, February 12, 2018, <http://www.mitosmag.com/sadakichi-hartmanns-moving-pictures-1/2018/2/12/sadakichi-hartmanns-moving-pictures>. Grace E. Lavery writes: "Hartmann has proven difficult to place into history precisely on account of his eccentricity." Grace E. Lavery, "Introduction," *Quaint, Exquisite: Victorian Aesthetics and the Idea of Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), Kindle.
- 55 "List of Artists Who Recorded Sadakichi Hartmann," n.d., box 34, Sadakichi Hartmann papers.
- 56 Lisa Mintz Messinger, "The Critic Sadakichi Hartmann as the Subject of a Caricature by Marius de Zayas," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 48 (January 2013): 239–42, <https://doi.org/10.1086/675326>.
- 57 "Four Views of San Jacinto: Pastels in Prose by Sadakichi Hartmann," n.d., box 6, Sadakichi Hartmann papers.
- 58 Christopher Reed, *Bachelor Japanists: Japanese Aesthetics and Western Masculinities*, Modernist Latitudes (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 38.
- 59 Author's emphasis. Lavery, *Quaint, Exquisite*, Chapter 1.
- 60 Nojima, "Mixed Race Capital," 55.
- 61 "During Hartmann's delivery of a travel monologue, various floral fragrances were blown toward the audience by enormous electric fans in order to evoke the essence of distant cultures." Weaver, *Sadakichi Hartmann*, 4. In 2014, an artistic team attempted to revive Hartmann's perfume concert at the Hammer Museum in a performance titled, "Japan in Sixteen Minutes, Revisited"—a testament to the John Cage-like conceptual staying power of Hartmann's 1902 sensory and environmental orientalist

concept. Erika R. Hendry, "Traveling to Japan—Through a Symphony of Smells," *Smithsonian Magazine*, January 10, 2014, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/innovation/traveling-to-japan-through-a-bouquet-of-smells-180949324>.

⁶² Lavery, *Quaint, Exquisite*, chapter 1.

⁶³ Sadakichi Hartmann, *A History of American Art* (Boston: L.C. Page, 1901).

⁶⁴ Sadakichi Hartmann, *Japanese Art* (Boston: L.C. Page, 1903), 162–63.

⁶⁵ Lavery's *Quaint, Exquisite* opens with a quote from Hartmann's chapter, indicating the primacy of his voice in a discussion of aesthetic legacies and the complex treatment of Japan as an oriental subject. Lavery, "Introduction," in *Quaint, Exquisite*.

⁶⁶ For more on Hartmann's notion of "suggestivism," see Tia Anne Vasiliou, "The Power of Suggestiveness: Sadakichi Hartmann, Thomas Wilmer Dewing, and American Modernism" (master's thesis, University of California, Riverside, 2011).

⁶⁷ Sadakichi Hartmann, *The Whistler Book: A Monograph of the Life and Position in Art of James McNeill Whistler, Together with a Careful Study of His More Important Works* (Boston : L.C. Page, 1910), 62.

⁶⁸ Bert Winther-Tamaki, "The Asian Dimensions of Postwar Abstract Art: Calligraphy and Metaphysics," in *The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860–1989*, ed. Alexandra Munroe (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2009), 151–53.

⁶⁹ Hartmann, *The Whistler Book*, 67.

⁷⁰ Hartmann, *The Whistler Book*, 62. It is well documented that Whistler and other artists of the aesthetic movement had extensive collections of Japanese art and objects. Henry Adams, "John La Farge's Discovery of Japanese Art: A New Perspective on the Origins of Japonisme," *The Art Bulletin* 67, no. 3 (September 1985): 449, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3050962>; Colta Feller Ives, *The Great Wave: The Influence of Japanese Woodcuts on French Prints* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1974). Whistler's use of Japanese art is also mentioned by his biographers in 1908, in brief. Elizabeth R. Pennell and Joseph Pennell, *The Life of James McNeill Whistler* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1908), 112.

⁷¹ Clark, "Little Postage Stamps of Native Soil," 60; Frank Chin and Copyright Paperback Collection (Library of Congress), eds., *Aiiieeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* (New York, N.Y: Mentor, 1991), xxi.

⁷² Anne Throop, "A Pastel Artist," n.d., "'Revelations' Scrapbook," Sadakichi Hartmann papers.

⁷³ Josephine Nock-Hee Park, *Apparitions of Asia: Modernist Form and Asian American Poetics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), chapter 2, Kindle.

⁷⁴ Richard Hill, "The First Hippie." It also bears noting that Hartmann lived near the Coachella Valley, the site of the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival, which conceives of its festival culture as in dialogue with hippies and counterculture.

⁷⁵ Hartmann, *White Chrysanthemums*, 120.