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Japanese Life: Function, Form and Formality

The Exhibition: A Conceptual and Thematic Overview

In my exhibition, I explore Japanese life, art, product design and culture. The exhibition focuses on three themes of 'Function', 'Form' and 'Formality' - hence its title. These themes also define the nature of the visitor experience, both in terms of the selected exhibits and 'flow' of movement past them.

Firstly, by focusing on the linked concepts of 'Function' and 'Form' the exhibition thematically highlights the relationship between Japanese product design and the minimalistic philosophy of *Ma*. For example, it features a selection of products that emphasise the functional aspect of their design and how this both represents Japanese culture and contrasts with Western aesthetic forms. The exhibition then develops to a display of iconic Manga panels. These demonstrate how the medium combines the two concepts of function and form. It concludes by showcasing photographers and wood cut artists whose work illustrates the final theme of 'Formality' in Japanese culture and how this informs so many aspects of daily life in the country.

My chosen venue for the exhibition is The Mission Gallery in Swansea, as this is a small and intimate exhibition space which mirrors the minimalist approach I aim to illustrate as an underlying concept.

The visitor experience is designed to be visual, auditory and even ingestive, stimulating all the senses; it will additionally be supplemented by a separate website. The latter will both provide the opportunity for visitors to extend their experience through further virtual exhibits and independent research. This also reflects the more creative and blended approaches to exhibition display that have developed in the sector during the global pandemic.

The research process which explains how I arrived at the concept for my exhibition is detailed in Appendices A-H, which track my initial mind-mapping through to the development of each of the three core themes, and the relationships between them. Initial research also focused on the configuration of the gallery and how this shaped my curatorial decisions in terms of displaying the chosen exhibits (see also Appendix I, J and K). The smaller, more intimate area of the gallery (the Apse) lends itself to the display of smaller artworks – the manga and reproductions of prints. The area immediately at the end of Apse has three windows and, as I did not want to fragment the display, I decided it was an ideal place for visitor reflection and to offer the themed refreshments.

'Function and Form'

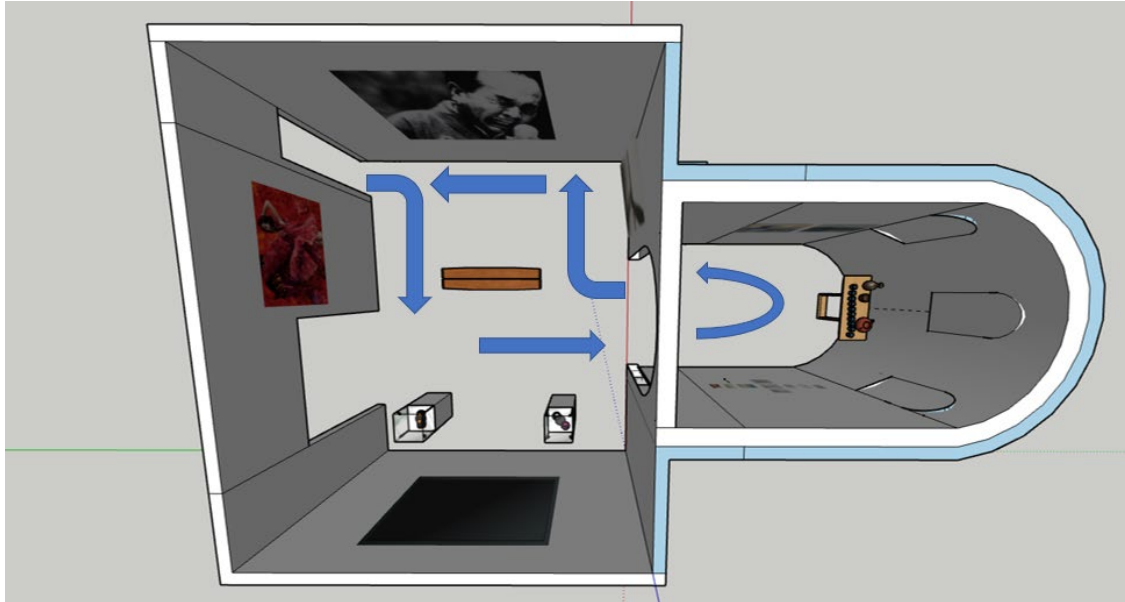


Fig 1. Gallery Overview

After entering through the gallery's left-hand door, the visitor's experience starts by exploring the relationship between 'Function and Form'. These are the closely linked first and second themes of the exhibition that are featured on the right-hand wall. Visitors immediately interact with two deliberately minimalist display cabinets, one featuring a scale model of contemporary Nissan GT-R supercar and the other containing two Kintsugi Ceramic structures.

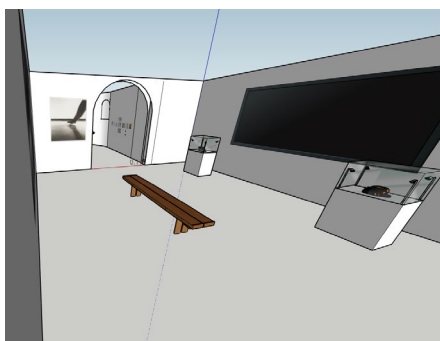


Fig 2. 'Function and Form' overview

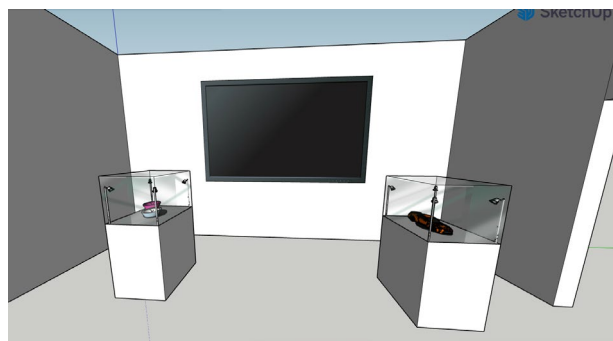


Fig 3. 'Function and Form' close up

The GT-R, produced by the iconic car manufacturer Nissan, is an outstanding representation of how the Japanese combine the minimistic idea of design (the function) with culture (the form). It also draws the inspiration for its design from anime such as Moblie Suit Gundam (Loo, 2007). The car is prehaps the ultimate expresion of Japanse design, demonstrasting how high art design (such as that reflected in Gundam robots) meets the functional needs of product design for consumers. The GT-R is additionally a prime example of the *Kaizen* philosophy in Japanse design. This encapsulates the approach to continuous improvement which underpins much of Japan's corporate behaviour and mindset (Kaizen: Gaining the Benefits of Continuous Improvement, 2018). It is exemplified in the 13 years of development that culminates in the current model of the car (Nissan Official Global

Newsroom, 2019). This, in turn, is reflected in the scale replica included in my exhibition. Finally, the GT-R's design can be seen as an embodiment of the application *Ma*, the Japanese philosophy of minimalism (Canning, 2021). This highlights the functional aspect of design (Jarrell, 2016), that is the *use* of a product as well as its *form*. For example, the GT-R, while having a very distinct sense of Japanese style in its design, also has a very heavy focus on function (Nissan GT-R - Page 2 - Car Body Design, 2007). One key feature that highlights the influence of *Ma* in the car's design is its "aero blades" or vents behind the front wheels. These funnel hot air away from the brakes, tyres and down the side of the car to achieve two key benefits: cooling key components while improving the GT-R's aerodynamics (2010 Nissan GT-R Press Kit, 2008).

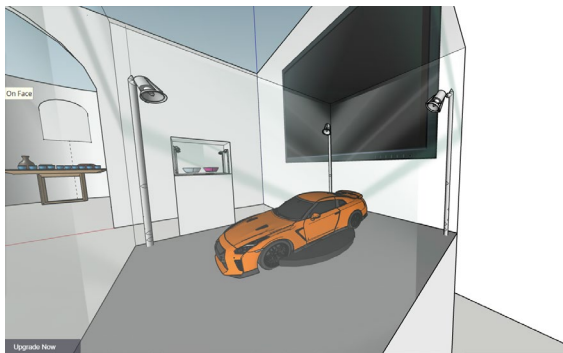


Fig 4. 2018 Nissan GT-R R35 Scale Model

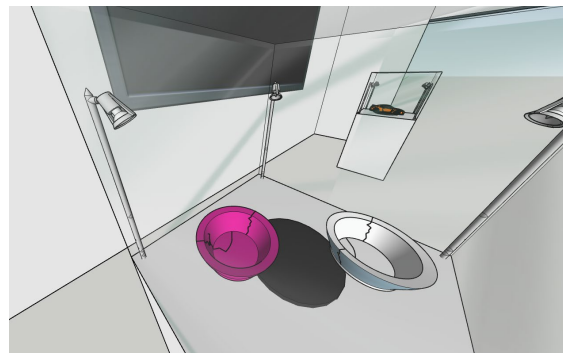


Fig 5. Meiji Period Kintsugi Ceramic Saucer plates

The second exhibits in relation to "Function and Form" are ceramic plates designed and produced during the late Meiji period (Antique Kintsugi, 2021). These were chosen to reflect the philosophies of *Wabi Sabi* and *Kintsugi*. The essence of *Wabi Sabi* is to embrace the imperfections of life, while *Kintsugi* takes that concept and applies it to broken ceramics rejoining them together with gold to celebrate their imperfections (Wabi-sabi and the Art of Kintsugi – KonMari | The Official Website of Marie Kondo, 2021). These philosophies have been included in the exhibition as both contrast sharply with Western ideals of perfection.

The use of the video screen in this section of the exhibition, positioned behind the cabinets, is designed to differentiate, and offer variety to the visitor experience. Wireless headphones located on the Japanese-style bench ensures that the auditory experience offered is not a distraction to visitors enjoying other stages of the exhibition.

The third phase of the "Function and Form" themes of the exhibition then take the visitor into a series of exhibits further down the right hand side of the gallery. These explore how iconic Manga panels reflect Japanese culture and contrast with the style of Western graphic novel. The Manga panels (see Figures 6, 7 and Appendix J) reflect the sensibilities of minimalism and how the Japanese tend to value the "pauses" of empty space in a scene rather than the detailed elements of scenes found in western comics (Comic vs Manga Art, 2017). This is also true of the dialogue in Manga; there is far less of it in comparison to the speech found in the panels of western comics.

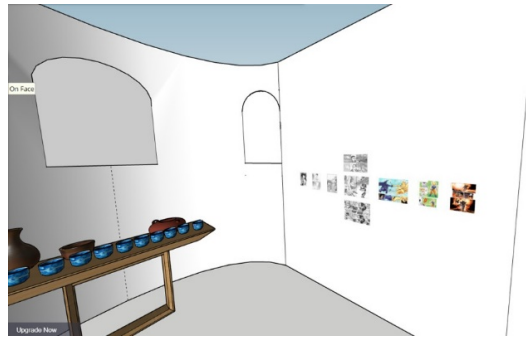


Fig 6. Manga panels in situ



Fig 7. Close up of Manga panels

‘Formality’

‘Formality’ is a recurrent and central theme in Japanese culture and society - whether this be in relation to its honorific language referred to as *Keigo*, or highly developed use of ceremony and etiquette in many aspects of public life (Academy, 2016). This emphasis on formality additionally reflects Japan’s position as “one of the most uncertainty avoiding countries on earth” (Country Comparison - Hofstede Insights, 2021). It is for this reason that I selected it as the final experience of the exhibition.

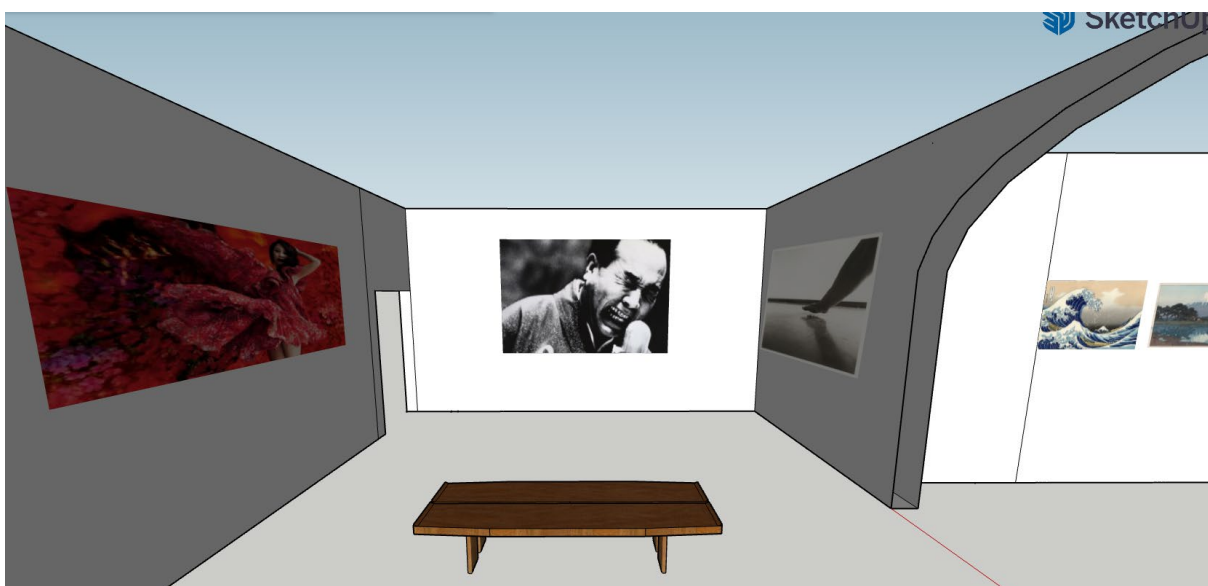


Fig 8. ‘Formality’ overview

This final theme of 'Formality' therefore will be represented by a combination of woodcut prints and photographs.

The woodcuts I have selected (see also Appendix C) are Hokusai's iconic 'The Breaking Wave of Kanagawa' and Hiroshu Yoshida's 'Suzukawa' (Invaluable, 2018). I did so because of their precise observational expressions of the landscapes, both featuring Mount Fuji, emphasising the key characteristics of simplicity of form and the beauty and power of nature.

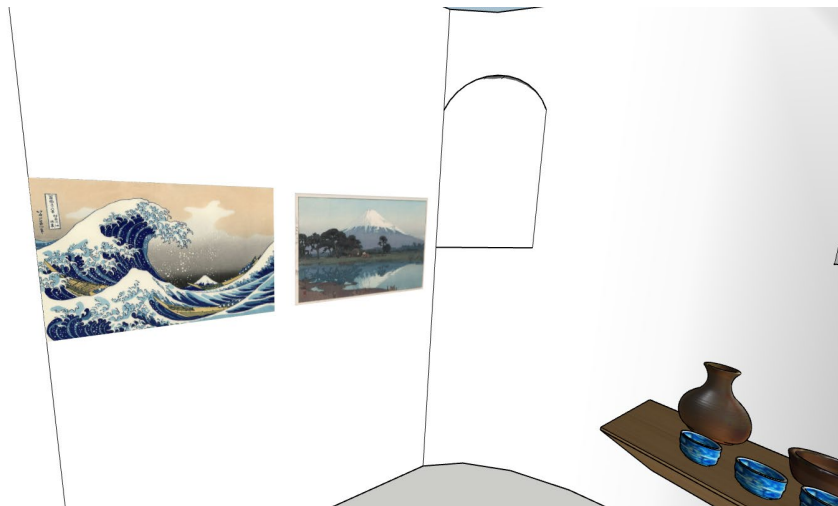


Fig 9. Woodblock prints

For the photographic exhibits (see Appendix B), further on the left-hand side of the gallery, I selected Kōji Enokura's "P.W. No. 51 Symptom—Floor, Hand" and an image from Mika Ninagawa's Rizzoli book and Daido Moriyama's "Entertainer on Stage". The curatorial decisions here were made on the basis of the photographers depiction of people and clothing, and how they contrast with the surrounding environment.

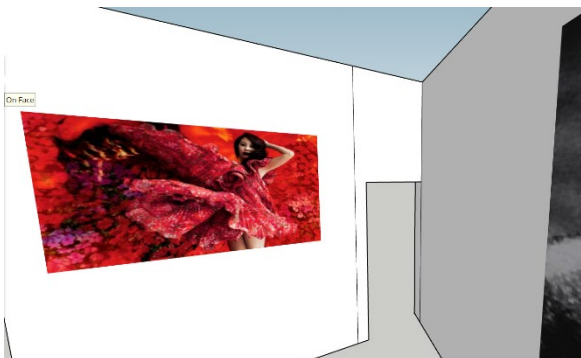


Fig 10. Photograph exhibit an image from Mika Ninagawa's Rizzoli book



Fig 11. Photograph exhibits Kōji Enokura's "P.W. No. 51 Symptom—Floor, Hand" and Daido Moriyama's "Entertainer on Stage"

At the end of their exhibition experience, the visitor will be encouraged to reflect whilst enjoying a complimentary drink of saki or green tea as an ingestive extension to the previous visual and auditory stimuli. Visitors will also be signposted to the exhibition's website, where they will be able to further explore the themes that have been covered.

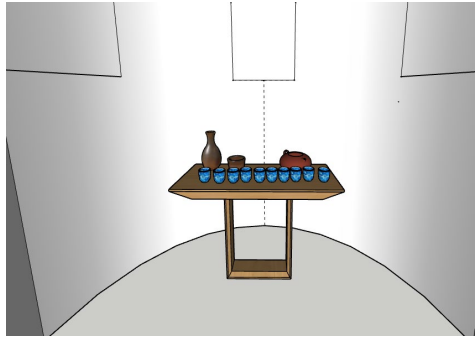


Fig 12. Refreshments

As a result of this engaging and all round experience, the visitor should have gained a deeper and enjoyable insight into the inter relationship between the themes of Function, Form and Formality which sit at the heart of Japanese design, culture - and life.

Appendix A: Initial mind mapping of exhibition themes

My mind map of my initial theme and what I want to do with it.



Fig 1. Japanese Art Mind map, initial ideas for exhibition PowerPoint, James Peaple, 2021

This led to an initial exploration of iconic Japanese photographers from the 60's to the present day, the cultural impact both Anime and Manga and significant paintings produced by Japanese artists. Following on from this initial mind map I narrowed my themes down to 'function, form and formality.'

Aspects of Japanese culture I want to focus on and how they contrast with Western/European culture

- Function and Form – e.g product design?
- Formality- product design, photography and woodcut paintings?
- Lifestyle and culture? – Photography, woodcut paintings manga or anime or all of them together?

Fig 2. Aspects of Japanese Culture, initial ideas for exhibition PowerPoint, James Peaple, 2021

Appendix B: Research on photographers

I further developed research on various photographers, woodcut artists, sculpture, fine art Japanese sport, manga and design philosophies.

Photography

I feel that the photos below emphasis the potential themes I want to explore, in particular the Entertainer on Stage by Daido Moriyama, reflects the idea of function and form because the title conveys what's in the photo.



Daido Moriyama, Entertainer on Stage, Shimizu 1967



Mika Ninagawa Museum of Contemporary Art Taipei, 2016



Taiji MATSUE, Chi 0254, 2002 Taiji Matsue



Osamu Jinguji, Time 3#003



Mika Ninagawa, teamLab Borderless



Shunji Dodo "Album"

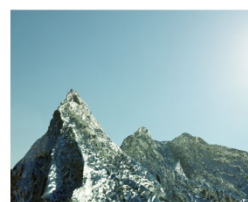
Fig 3. Japanese Photographers, initial ideas for exhibition PowerPoint, James Peuple, 2021



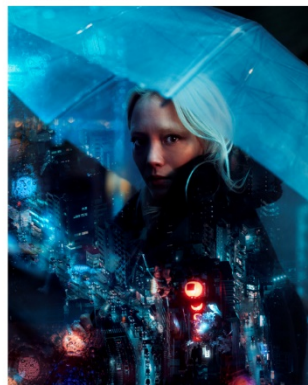
Mika Ninagawa



Takehito Miyatake.



Hiroshi Sugimoto "Primal Mountain." Shōmei Tōmatsu, "Oh! Shinjuku," 1969



Liam Wong, Plom Klementieff, To:ky:oo
I feel that



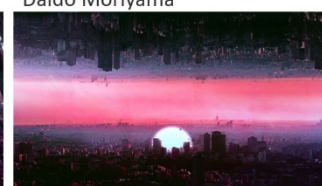
Liam Wong, Blade Runner Blues, To:ky:oo



Daido Moriyama



Liam Wong, Daydreaming in Japan



Liam Wong, Neo Tokyo



Kōji Enokura, "P.W. No. 51 Symptom—Floor, Hand," 1974

Fig 4. Japanese Photographers continued, initial ideas for exhibition PowerPoint, James Peuple, 2021

For the photographers, I focused on well-established and globally recognized practitioners: Shomei Tomatsu (Meyers, 2021), Daido Moriyama (Japan in 10 iconic images | The Independent Photographer, 2021) and Mika Ninagawa (Smail, 2015). I also added the work of Liam Wong, a Scottish born video game designer/photographer currently based in Tokyo, as I wanted to explore how westerners view and interpret Japanese culture in their work (Wong, 2020).

Appendix C: Research on paintings and woodcuts

Paintings – Woodcut prints?



Spring Warmth Goshu Hayami



Goshu Hayami,
Chrysanthemum and cat



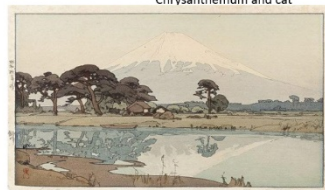
Hokusai- The Breaking Wave of Kanagawa



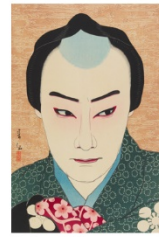
Utamaro (1753-1806), Ukiyo- e
prints (one of two shown)



Kawase Hasui, Lake
Chūzenji at Nikkō, 1930



Hiroshi Yoshida, Suzukawa



Natori Shunsen, Japanese, The Actor
Nakamura Ganjirō I as Sakata Tōjūrō,
1925



Effect's on western culture e.g
"The Letter" Mary Cassatt
1890-91

Fig 5. Japanese Woodcut prints/paintings, initial ideas for exhibition PowerPoint, James Peuple, 2021

I then explored Japanese woodcut prints, which lead me to iconic works such as Hokusai's 'The Breaking Wave of Kanagawa'. I then researched further artists such as Goshu Hayami (Gyoshu HAYAMI's artworks - Japanese Painting Gallery, 2021), Hiroshu Yoshdia (What You Should Know About Japanese Woodblock Prints, 2018) and Kawase Hasui (Selections from the Haggin Print Collection: Japanese Woodblock Prints – Haggin Museum, 2021). I subsequently wanted to explore how this style has influenced western culture - for example "The Letter" by Mary Cassatt (What You Should Know About Japanese Woodblock Prints, 2018).

Appendix D: Research into sculpture and fine art

I next undertook research into Japanese sculpture and fine art.

Sculpture



Tamonten in Todai Wood, Edo Period



Mythical group in bronze, after 1881, Khalili Collection of Japanese Art



Kannon and Shishi Edo Period Bizen Ceramic Sculpture (item #697160)



Head of a Guardian 13th century Japan, Karakura: Realism and spirituality in the sculpture of Japan, Asia New York Society.

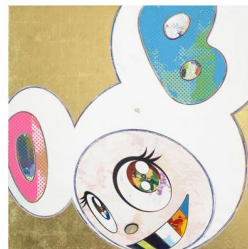
Japanese sculpture originally started with clay figures, examples of which include Dogu and Haniwa (Japanese sculpture - Wikipedia, 2021a). When Japan started to integrate Buddhism from mainland Asia into its culture the country's sculpture also started to change, reflecting this in the Asuka and Hakuho periods (Japanese sculpture - Wikipedia, 2021b). By The Nara period Japanese craftsmen started to create sculptures which had more realistic attributes, in particular the faces. In the Heian period wood became the primary resource of sculptures such as statues and temples (Japanese sculpture - Wikipedia, 2021c). The "Renaissance era of Japanese sculpture" came with the Kamakura period when the Ken school utilised the "yosegi-zukuri" of wood construction which aimed to express Sentiment, Solidity and finally movement (Japanese sculpture - Wikipedia, 2021d). Muromachi and Sengoku periods introduced the iconic Noh masks (Japanese sculpture - Wikipedia, 2021e). The Edo period saw the introduction of Netsuke which are sculptures made from Ivory or wood which mainly used animals or imaginary creatures as the primary subject (Japanese sculpture - Wikipedia, 2021f). When the emperor took control of Japan the Samurai class was abolished and other aspects of Japanese culture began to be westernised and sculptures began to craft sculptures for Western and European tastes (Japanese sculpture - Wikipedia, 2021G).

Fig 6. Japanese Sculpture, initial ideas for exhibition PowerPoint, James Peaple, 2021

Fine Art



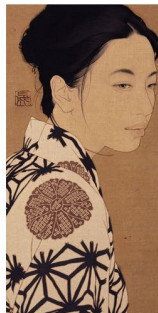
"FLOWER BALL (3-D) KINDERGARTEN" BY TAKASHI MURAKAMI, 2007



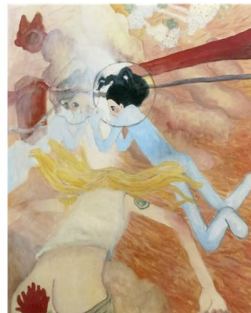
"AND THEN X 6 (GOLD & WHITE: THE SUPERFLAT METHOD" BY TAKASHI MURAKAMI, 2012



Lots, lots of Kaikai and Kiki, By Takashi Murakami, 2009



Soot and Gold, Ayuko by Ikenaga Yasunari, 2016



Aya Takano, Toward Eternity, 2006



Yoshitomo Nara, Cosmic Girl (Eyes Open, Eyes Shut), 2008

Fig 7. Japanese Fine Art, initial ideas for exhibition PowerPoint, James Peaple, 2021

Appendix E: Research into Japanese sporting art

Being an Olympic year, I thought it would be an interesting idea to explore pieces which depict the history and culture of Japanese sport through the host city posters an iconography.

Japanese sport?

- Being the Japanese Olympic year, I could possibly look for pieces which describe the history of Japanese sport. Japan last hosted the Olympics in 1964, having had the 1940 games cancelled due to the outbreak of the Second World War.



Fig 8. Japanese Sport, initial ideas for exhibition PowerPoint, James Peuple, 2021

I then decided to incorporate Manga and Anime as they form a key part of Japanese culture and is also personal passion. The ideas I have about Manga and Anime are inspired from my visit to a Manga exhibition at the British Museum in 2019.

Appendix F: Consideration of manga and/or anime exhibits

Manga or Anime?

- Explore the most iconic manga panels in Japanese culture or include manga panels which have significance to me. Possibly include screenshots of iconic anime scenes or again scenes that are significant to me. This is inspired by a Manga Exhibition in London I went to in 2019.

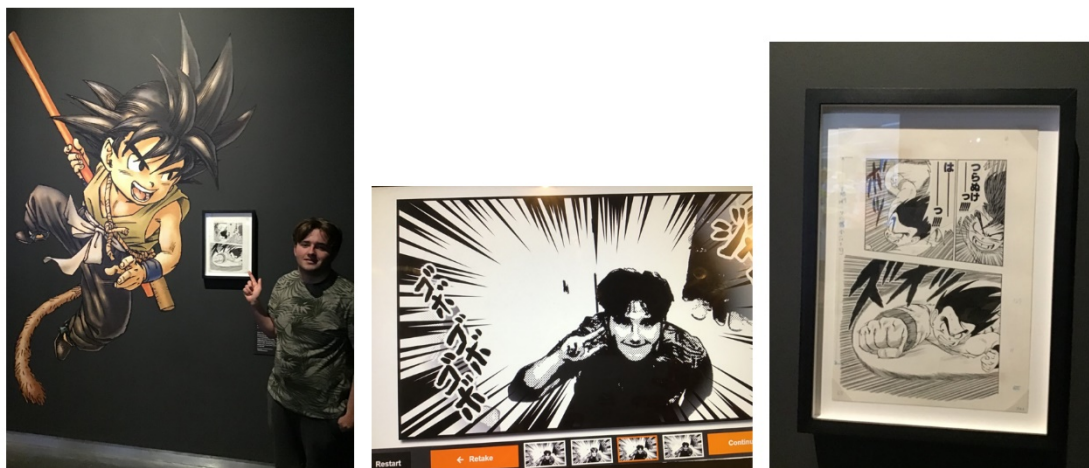


Fig 9. Manga or Anime?, initial ideas for exhibition PowerPoint, James Peuple, 2021

Appendix G: Research on minimalism and product design

I have explored design philosophies in Japanese product design (Japanese Product Design and Design in Asia, 2011) starting with *Ma* - the Japanese philosophy of minimalism which highlights the function aspect of design (Jarrell, 2016). *Ma* relates to Japanese product design and culture through the theme of function: the use of a product as well as its form. For example, the Nissan GT-R, Japan's most iconic supercar, while having a very distinct sense of Japanese style in its design, also has a very heavy focus on function (Nissan GT-R - Page 2 - Car Body Design, 2007). One key feature that highlights the influence of *Ma* in its design is the "aero blades" vents behind the front wheels. These funnel hot air away from the brakes, tires and down the side of the car achieving two key benefits: cooling key components while improving the GT-R's aerodynamics (2010 Nissan GT-R Press Kit, 2008).

Japanese Product design

- Notable design philosophies-
- *Ma*- the Japanese philosophy which depicts the country's minimalistic approach to design. *Ma* emphasis the function aspect of the design form.



O,Meylan. The Spirt of Harmony and Japanese Design Today
Exhibition, Japan Cultural Institute of Paris, 2008-2011

Fig 10. Japanese product Design Notable Design Philosophies - *Ma*, initial ideas for exhibition PowerPoint, James Peaple, 2021

Appendix H: Research into the philosophies of Wabi Sabi, Kintsugi and Kaizen

I also considered *Wabi Sabi*, which is the Japanese term and philosophy for imperfection (Littler, 2020).

Wabi Sabi

- The term Wabi Sabi (Wabi being bittersweet/melencoly of being alone and Sabi being how the age of an object can enhance its beauty) is the Japanese term for how imperfection can enhance an object, building or pace.



Sand Berg Wallpaper, Wabi Sabi Grey, UX Collective, Why we need more Wabisabi, 2020

Fig 11. Wabi Sabi, initial ideas for exhibition PowerPoint, James Peaple, 2021

Wabi Sabi in turn influences the *Kintsugi* philosophy which depicts taking broken pieces of ceramics and joining them together with gold, repurposing the objects while embracing their flaws (Thomas, 2021) An exhibit will show this through a Japanese sculpture.

Kintsugi

- Kintsugi (Kin meaning gold and Tsugi meaning joinery) is a Japanese Philosophy adopted from the Zen Buhdist approach to ceramics which is essentially taking broken pieces of a ceramics and having them “join with gold” to restore the pieces but that same time show the effects that the passage of time has had upon them. This philosophy has influences from the Wabi Sabi philosophy of imperfection.



Design Museum Shop, Kintsugi repair kit gold

Holiday at The Sea, Greif, Kintsugi and The Art of Precious Scars

Lakeside Pottery, Kintsugi Art- How it is made, Where to buy pottery with Gold Repair

Fig 12. Kintsugi, initial ideas for exhibition PowerPoint, James Peaple, 2021

Kaizen

- Kaizen is the Japanese philosophy of self improvement. The Kaizen philosophy depicts the constant need to evolve and fine tune.

Fig 13. Kaizen, initial ideas for exhibition PowerPoint, James Peaple, 2021

I also want to explore and contrast this with the Japanese philosophy of *Kaizen*, again using the Nissan GT-R as an example (2020 Nissan GT-R NISMO put to the test, 2019a). This is based on the constant desire to evolve and fine tune (Kaizen: Gaining the Benefits of Continuous Improvement, 2021).

Appendix I: Research into the background to curatorial decision making

As a key part of the process, I researched the basis of curatorial decision making (Curatorial Practice, 2021).

Curatorial decisions

- The basic idea of a curator is to place the pieces in the space which complements the theme or idea of the exhibition.
- My ideas for curating my exhibition(so far) if I were to use the Mission Gallery:
- Have three sections of the gallery to represent my three themes I have chosen:
- Function and Form- product design
- Formality- Product design and woodcut prints
- Lifestyle- photography, woodcut painting, manga and anime etc.
- Title for exhibition: Japanese Life: Function, Form and Formality
- Maybe include personal possessions of my own that represent Japan e.g 2018 Nissan GT-R toy model from Nissan Ginza Tokyo, Manga books and anime DVD's etc to represent each theme.

Fig 14. Curatorial Decisions, initial ideas for exhibition PowerPoint, James Peaple, 2021

Appendix J: List of exhibits

Scale model of a 2018 Nissan GT-R R35 Premium Edition

Restored Meiji Period Ceramic Saucer plates

Video to explain Kaizen, Wabi Sabi and Kintsugi philosophies

9 Manga panels as follows:

1. Mobile Suit Gundam Origins colour panel
2. Dragon Ball Z Goku vs Frieza Colour
3. Naruto, Sasuke, Minato vs Obito
4. The Walking Man 1
5. Alita Battle Angel Alita vs Janga Motorball
6. Naruto vs Sasuke Final Fight colour
7. Walking Man 2
8. The Willow Tree
9. Dragon Ball Z Goku and Vegeta

Hiroshu Yoshida's 'Suzakawa' woodcut

Katsushika Hokusai's 'The Breaking Wave of Kanagawa' woodcut

Koji Enokura's 'P.W. No. 51 Symptom, - floor, hand' photograph

Mika Ninagawa's image from Rizzoli book 2010

Daido Moriyama's 'Entertainer on Stage' photograph

Appendix K: Link to SketchUp exhibition 3D model and presentation for initial ideas.

The link to SketchUp exhibition Below:

[SketchUp](#)

Link to the power point presentation of initial ideas : [Japanese exhibition initial ideas presentation .pdf](#)

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Figure 9. Woodblock prints, James Peaple, 2021

Figure 10. Photograph exhibit an image from Mika Ninagawa's Rizzoli book, James Peaple, 2021

Figure 11. Photograph exhibits Kōji Enokura's "P.W. No. 51 Symptom—Floor, Hand" and Daido Moriyama's "Entertainer on Stage", James Peaple, 2021

Figure 12. Refreshments, James Peaple, 2021