

## DEVELOPMENT OF FEMALE ARTIST IDENTITY IN THE 19TH CENTURY: AN EXAMINATION IN THE CONTEXT OF PRINT ART

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**Abstract:** *The 19th century stands as a pivotal period in art history, marked by significant strides in both artistic expression and the struggle for women's rights. Women encountered various obstacles as they endeavoured to carve out their identities, seeking greater recognition and acceptance within the artistic sphere. However, this journey was fraught with substantial impediments to women's artistic and educational development. Initially, during the first half of the 19th century, access to art education for women was severely restricted. Often deprived of formal artistic training, they were typically relegated to home or private tutoring. This limitation significantly hindered women's efforts to establish themselves in the art world. Moreover, upon entering the realm of art, women faced societal resistance. A considerable portion of society questioned, and even outright rejected, the notion of women actively participating in the art world. Nevertheless, certain progressive artists and advocates endeavoured to strengthen the identities of female painters and secure their recognition. Over time, particularly in the latter half of the 19th century, educational opportunities expanded for some women, leading to their admission into art schools. This represented a significant step in enabling female painters to develop their artistic talents and find their expressive voices. Female painters often utilized their art to advance the cause of women's rights. Through their works, they sought to promote social change and emphasize the strength and worth of women. Consequently, female painters frequently collaborated with feminist movements. In this context, female painters typically focused on female experiences in their works. Themes such as gender roles, family dynamics, nature, and the female body were commonly explored. Additionally, female painters developed various techniques and styles to articulate their emotions and thoughts. This paper will focus on the growing interest in new techniques and styles emerging at the beginning of the 20th century, specifically focusing on Western female painters. Furthermore, it will examine the interaction between the development of the Western female artist identity and the traditional Japanese printmaking art, which holds significant prominence in Eastern art.*

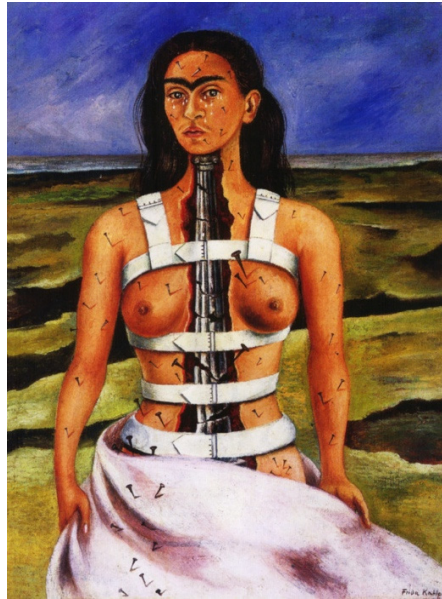
**Key words:** 19th Century Women Artists, Printmaking, Ukiyo-e

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The late 19th and early 20th centuries witnessed the birth of modern art. The modernization of art represented an innovative period that questioned traditional aesthetic understandings and social norms. Movements such as Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Cubism, and Abstract Art challenged the traditional boundaries of art and introduced new aesthetic approaches. Women painters played important roles in this modernization process. However, their contributions during this period have generally been less recognized than those of male artists. This can be attributed to the obstacles they faced in accessing art education and professional opportunities. During that time, women were generally not admitted to formal art schools, and many women artists had difficulty receiving education in male-dominated art academies. In other words, women painters faced limited access to artistic education, professional networks, and exhibition opportunities. From Seurat's era until the 20th century, academic environments where artists found space for their early work were typically studios, where detailed drawings were made and discussed from nude models. These workspaces provided formal academic education supporting talented artists' pedagogy and connections (Nochlin, 2015).

To overcome such obstacles, women painters sought to establish a presence in the art world by creating their own studios and organizing independent exhibitions. In this context, they discovered their own identities and social roles through artistic expression. Women painters, in particular, produced works that questioned both women's identity and their social roles. These works reflect women's experiences, emotions, and their relationships with societal expectations. Frida Kahlo is one of the most important female representatives of modern art. Kahlo's unique style and autobiographical themes offered an artistic form of expression for women's identity. Her note in her work "Broken Column" (Figure 1) that says, "This body does not belong to me," reflects an understanding of art that questions both her

personal and social identity. These and similar works by Kahlo represent an important step toward the artistic representation of women's identity (Souter, 2012). Frida Kahlo's autobiographical and symbolic works, Georgia O'Keeffe's reflections on nature and female identity, and Judy Chicago's feminist art projects are all significant examples of these themes in the art world.



*Figure 1: Simulation results*

Within the modernization movement, feminist movements had a significant impact on the representation of women painters in the art world. The feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s used art as an important tool to make women painters' voices heard and to draw attention to gender inequality. The feminist art movements that emerged during this period advocated for the rights of women painters and brought the issue of gender inequality to the forefront of the art world. Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* (1974–1979) is an iconic feminist artwork that addresses women's history and gender inequality. Chicago said about her work, "I wanted to transform women's history and cultural heritage into an artistic expression" (Gerhard, 2013). Women artists faced many challenges in gaining recognition in the art market and selling their works. While male artists generally enjoyed more exhibition opportunities and commercial success, women artists were often marginalized. This inequality resulted in female painters receiving less recognition in the art market, and their works being sold at lower prices.

In response to this situation, women painters have developed various strategies to gain greater visibility in the art market. They have established women artist groups and collectives and organized their projects and exhibitions. These independent movements have helped women painters secure a stronger position in the art world. Additionally, many contemporary women artists effectively use digital platforms and social media to promote their work and advance their careers. The roles of women artists in the modernization process, the representation of women's identity in the art world, and their struggles in the art market hold significant importance in the evolution of art. The challenges women painters face illustrates how gender inequality manifests in the art world, while also showcasing how these artists have established a strong and independent presence in the market. The artistic production of women painters is considered an important form of expression that challenges gender norms and emphasizes women's identity. In this context, the contributions of women artists have helped create a more egalitarian and inclusive environment in the art world (Öztürk, 2020).

The influence of Japanese art on the West began in 1854 when Japan opened up to foreign trade. Japanese prints (ukiyo-e) were greatly admired by Western artists and soon became fashionable in art circles. Western artists were captivated by the innovative presentation, simple aesthetics, use of colour, and abstract compositions of Japanese prints. Female painters, in particular, saw the opportunities offered by this new artistic language as a significant area of freedom. Japanese aesthetics challenged the naturalism and academic rules of traditional Western art, contributing to the development of a freer and more experimental artistic language. This shift also created important opportunities for female painters. Since women in the West had limited access to art education and the professional art world, the

alternative approaches offered by Japanese art enriched their forms of expression. For example, American painter Mary Cassatt was influenced by Japanese print art and approached female figures, in particular, from a different perspective. The simplicity and tranquillity of Japanese art allowed Cassatt to depict the daily lives of women from a more subjective point of view in her works. Art critic Linda Nochlin explains this influence in Cassatt's work as follows: "Cassatt questioned the traditional image of women by depicting their domestic lives and intimate moments, drawing inspiration from Japanese art (Lochlin, 2015).

## 2. METHODS

In this paper, qualitative research based on documents and records in field studies has been included. Scanning methods of various sources, such as professional books and periodicals, whether in written or digital form, were employed. The study was created by gathering data obtained through impressions and observations based on work experience acquired in previous years.

## 3. THE INTERACTION OF WESTERN WOMEN PAINTERS WITH UKIYO-E

Traditional Japanese printmaking has been one of the significant aesthetic movements that deeply influenced Western art, especially in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Japanese printmaking (Ukiyo-e), in particular, contributed to the birth of a new artistic movement in Europe known as Japonism. This movement gained momentum when Western painters discovered Japanese art, especially Ukiyo-e. The minimal compositions, bold use of colour, and emphasis on patterns in Japanese art opened new horizons for many Western artists. Western women painters were also profoundly influenced by this interaction. Japanese aesthetics offered women painters an innovative perspective, both technically and aesthetically, allowing them to develop a more personal and original artistic language by distancing themselves from traditional art norms. This influence played an important role in shaping the artistic identities of women artists, who were often marginalized and overlooked in art history. Japanese prints (Ukiyo-e) were greatly admired by Western artists and soon became fashionable in art circles. Western painters were drawn to the simple aesthetics of Japanese prints, their use of flat colours, and abstract compositions. Women artists, in particular, viewed the possibilities offered by this new artistic language as a significant area of freedom. Japanese aesthetics provided valuable opportunities for women artists by contributing to the development of a freer and more experimental artistic language that challenged the naturalism and academic rules of traditional Western art.

Traditional Japanese printmaking was one of the important aesthetic movements that deeply influenced Western art in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Japanese printmaking (Ukiyo-e), in particular, contributed to the birth of a new artistic movement in Europe and inspired an art movement called Japonism. This movement gained momentum when Western painters discovered Japanese art, especially Ukiyo-e. The minimal compositions, bold use of colour, and understanding of patterns in Japanese art opened new horizons for many Western artists. Among those deeply influenced by this interaction were Western women painters. Japanese aesthetics provided women painters with an innovative perspective both technically and aesthetically, enabling them to move away from traditional art norms and develop a more personal and original language. This influence played a particularly significant role in shaping the artistic identities of women artists who had been marginalized and overlooked in art history. Japanese prints evoked great admiration among Western artists and quickly became fashionable in art circles. Western painters discovered the simplicity, flat colour usage, and abstract compositions of Japanese prints. Women artists, in particular, viewed the possibilities offered by this new artistic language as a great realm of freedom. Japanese aesthetics provided important opportunities for women artists by contributing to the formation of a more liberated and experimental artistic language that challenged the naturalism and academic rules of traditional Western art.

The influence of Japanese printmaking on Western women artists was not only aesthetic but also technical. Women artists began incorporating techniques seen in Japanese art, such as simplified forms, flat colour use, and the effective use of empty spaces, into their own works. These techniques added a new depth to their creations, leading them towards abstraction, symbolism, and minimalist approaches. Nature themes observed in Japanese art also resonated with Western women artists, making natural elements like landscapes, plants, and animals an important part of their works. Moreover, the more authentic and everyday depictions of female figures in Japanese art opened new thematic doors for Western women painters.

The influence of Japanese printmaking on Western women artists went beyond the technical innovations and aesthetic understanding it brought to their art. It also empowered them to challenge gender roles and express their artistic identities on a more personal level. This interaction marked a significant turning point that reshaped the position of women in Western art.

### 3.1 Mary Cassatt and Japanese Aesthetics

The 1850s marked when Japan opened up to foreign trade and Western art discovered Japanese art, leading to significant influences. The Japanese Art Exhibition held in Paris in 1890 profoundly impacted Western artists, including Mary Cassatt, who was greatly influenced by this exhibition. Cassatt explored elements of Japanese art such as its simple and asymmetrical compositions, flat colour areas, and abstract forms, incorporating these aesthetic aspects into her work. The simplicity and directness of Japanese prints, particularly ukiyo-e, significantly impacted her graphic works. Mary Cassatt, inspired by Japanese print art, deepened her art through this influence. After encountering Japanese art, Cassatt's aesthetic approach and compositions underwent a notable transformation. By employing techniques of coloured woodblock printing in her graphic art, she adapted the spirit of Japanese prints into her work. Depicting the daily lives of women and children, Cassatt developed a minimalist and simplified visual language inspired by Japanese prints, transforming her art both technically and thematically. According to art historian Nancy Mowll Mathews, Cassatt adopted the techniques and aesthetics of Japanese print art, developing a more straightforward and minimalist approach in her compositions. The influence of Japanese art was profound in her work and marked a significant turning point in her career (Mathews, 1994).

Mary Cassatt is especially known for her depictions of the daily lives of women and children. The portrayal of simple and ordinary moments from daily life, commonly seen in Japanese prints, resonated with Cassatt's artistic themes. In Japanese art, women were often depicted in tea ceremonies, daily chores, or interactions with their children, and these scenes were depicted with simple compositions and plain lines. By adopting this aesthetic approach, Cassatt's work can be seen as focusing more on the reality and naturalness of women's lives, rather than idealizing their daily existence as seen in Western art. The theme of motherhood, frequently featured in Japanese prints, also holds a significant place in Cassatt's art. For example, one of Cassatt's most famous works, "The Child's Bath" (1893) (Figure 2), strongly reflects a Japanese influence in its use of simple compositions and the minimalist presentation of figures. Art historian Katrina Gulliver explains this influence as follows: "Cassatt used the simple and asymmetrical perspectives she saw in Japanese prints to imbue her depictions of women and children with an emotionally charged intimacy." (Gulliver, 2012).



Figure 2: Mary Cassatt - *The Child's Bath*, 1893, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago (Art Institute Chicago, 2024)

The artist, who also transferred the technical possibilities of Japanese prints to her graphic works, especially the woodblock printing technique became a method frequently used by Cassatt in her graphic works. The sharp and distinct lines in Japanese prints provided both an aesthetic and technical innovation in Cassatt's female and child figures. The use of colours in large flat areas emphasized the movement and emotion in the figures. The minimal use of lines in Japanese art gave Cassatt's female figures a naturalness and delicacy. Cassatt's biographer Adelyn D. Breeskin praised Cassatt's prints as "her most original contribution... adding a new chapter to the history of graphic arts ... technically, as colour prints they have never been surpassed" (Lesso, 2019).

This aesthetic and technical understanding, which the artist developed through inspiration from Japanese printmaking, played a major role in the formation of her artistic identity. Through Japanese art, Cassatt developed a style that challenged the conventions of traditional Western art, allowing her to express the role of women and children in her art in a more meaningful and profound way. The aesthetic simplicity and technical finesse of Japanese printmaking form the basis of Cassatt's innovative approach to female figures and themes of motherhood. With this inspiration from Japanese art, Cassatt evolved her artistic identity towards a modern interpretation of art (Mathews, 1994).

### 3.2 Berthe Morisot and the Artistic Influences of Ukiyo-e

Berthe Morisot is another significant Western female artist influenced by Japanese art. The nature depictions and aesthetic approach seen in Japanese prints are evident in Morisot's work on nature and human figures. The simple and elegant compositions offered by Japanese art enabled Morisot to adopt an innovative approach to the use of light and colour. Although Morisot did not directly use Japanese print art, the influence of Japanese art in Europe can be seen indirectly in her work. The simplicity of Morisot's figures, the simplicity of her compositions, and her elegant portrayal of natural life align with the minimalist aesthetics of Japanese art. The impact of Japanese print art on Western artists has left a profound and lasting mark on Western art. With Japan opening up to foreign trade in the 1850s, Japanese art, particularly woodblock prints known as ukiyo-e, generated considerable admiration in the Western art world, especially in Paris. Japanese aesthetics challenged conventional Western perspectives and compositional rules, making simpler and more symbolic forms of expression possible. Although Morisot did not encounter Japanese art directly while working alongside artists like Claude Monet, Édouard Manet, and Pierre-Auguste Renoir in the late 19th century, the influence of this art on the Impressionist community is undeniable. Characteristic features of Japanese print art, such as flat compositions, simple lines, and the harmonious yet minimalist presentation of figures, are also evident in Morisot's depictions of women (Figure 3).

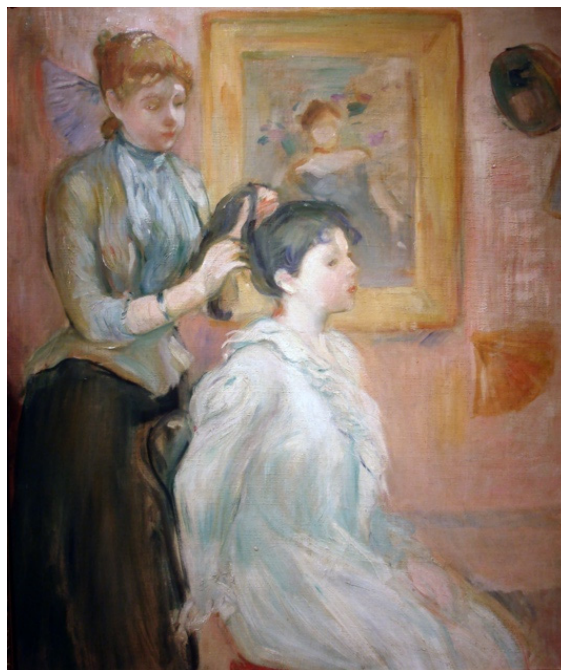


Figure 3: Berthe Morisot, *La Coiffure*, 1894, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (Artvee, 2024)

Art historian Linda Nochlin comments on the influence of Japanese art on the Impressionists: “The aesthetic revolution created by Japanese art in the West significantly contributed to the Impressionists’ liberated compositions. This influence was not limited to figures like Manet and Monet; it is also evident in Berthe Morisot’s elegant figure studies” (Lochlin, 2015). Throughout her artistic career, Berthe Morisot primarily focused on women, children, and scenes of everyday life. Morisot’s depictions of female figures are portrayed like those in Japanese prints—simple and elegant. These figures, without being overwhelmed by details, focus more on an emotional atmosphere and a minimalist aesthetic. The characteristic feature of Japanese print art, presenting figures simply and naturally, can also be felt in Morisot’s works. For instance, the frequent use of plain backgrounds in Morisot’s paintings of women allows for their natural and graceful representation. This approach may reflect a compositional understanding inspired by the minimalism of Japanese print art. As with Japanese prints, Morisot’s works maintain a simple relationship between the figures and the background, highlighting the figures prominently. Art historian Griselda Pollock expresses this influence as follows: “The simplicity and emotional intensity of Berthe Morisot’s female figures can be interpreted as an indirect effect of Japanese print art. The innovations brought by Japanese aesthetics to Western art are evident in Morisot’s refined and minimalist style” (Pollock, 1988).

The elegance of female figures in Japanese art had a notable impact on Impressionist female painters. In Japanese prints, female figures are often depicted in their natural states, as part of their daily lives. These depictions focus more on their reality rather than idealizing them. This approach allowed Berthe Morisot to present female figures more realistically and intimately in her work. T.J. Clark expresses this situation as follows: “The natural and simple portrayal of female figures in Japanese art provided Impressionist women painters like Morisot with new freedoms both technically and thematically. These female figures are far removed from the idealized images found in traditional Western art” (Clark, 1986). As an artist frequently depicting women’s daily lives within the home, Morisot captured a simplicity and naturalness akin to the aesthetic understanding of Japanese print art. Her depictions of women and children are presented in an emotional yet simple manner, adding aesthetic depth for the viewer. While we cannot say that Berthe Morisot developed a direct graphic technique from Japanese print art, the extensive use of flat colour in Japanese prints may have had an indirect influence on Morisot’s brushstrokes. The fine outlines surrounding figures and broad colour areas in Japanese print art can be compared to Morisot’s approach to creating spaces around female figures with her Impressionist brushstrokes. By integrating figures with their surroundings through the Impressionist use of light and colour, Morisot demonstrates an aesthetic approach closely related to the minimalism of Japanese print art.

### **3.3 Lilian May Miller and her interaction with Asian Culture**

Lilian May Miller was a contemporary American artist born in Tokyo, who established her place in the art world with her imagery. She signed her paintings with a monogram and often participated in exhibitions wearing traditional kimonos, drawing significant influence from ukiyo-e art. Unlike other Western female painters who lived in Japan, such as Helen Hyde, Elizabeth Keith, and Bertha Lum, Miller is recorded in history as the only female painter born in the Far East. Her works reflect the technical and aesthetic elements of Japanese print art. Miller combined the minimalist composition and colour usage offered by ukiyo-e with Western painting techniques, carving out a unique position in the modern art world. Her ability to present the simple yet profound themes of nature and human figures from Japanese print art is a standout feature of her work. In her prints, Miller drew inspiration from Shin-hanga printmaking, incorporating images of people and landscapes from her time in Japan and Korea (Figure 4). Her artistic presentation includes lyrical drawings, watercolours, and woodblock prints. Unlike the Shin-hanga movement, Miller personally prepared and printed all stages of her work and signed her paintings with a monogram she created herself (Frost, 2017).





Figure 4: Lilian May Miller. 1928. Yağmur Çiçekleri, Ahşap Baskı, (Ukiyo-e Search, 2024)

In ukiyo-e, a particular perspective and symmetrical arrangements are often prominent, with figures and landscapes presented in a simple and direct manner. Lilian May Miller adopted this aesthetic structure in her works, combining the symmetrical arrangements and perspectives of Japanese art with the more detailed and colourful approach of Western art. In ukiyo-e art, colours carry symbolic and emotional meanings. The brightness and simple application of colours achieved through woodblock printing offer a uniqueness previously unseen in Western art. Miller skillfully adapted this use of colour and minimalism into her own art. Particularly in her landscape paintings, the broad and flat colour areas characteristic of Japanese print art stand out. This highlights the significant role of Japanese aesthetics in Miller's artistic identity. The artist, who blends the simplicity of ukiyo-e with Western detail, is said to have used the power of symmetrical arrangement and perspective impeccably in her landscape paintings. Another critic, Arthur Kimura, notes Miller's success in colour usage, stating that she combines the minimalism of Japanese print art with the abstract expressionist language of modern art. "Her colour palette evokes the simple yet emotionally intense qualities of Ukiyo-e" (Artsper Magazine, 2020).

Lilian May Miller's art frequently features figures and nature themes inspired by Japanese ukiyo-e art. In Japanese prints, human figures and nature depictions are often presented with a simple and symmetrical approach. Miller carried the figurative attitude and the refined portrayal of nature from ukiyo-e into modern art through the themes she used in her works. The simple nature depictions in Japanese art took on new meanings in Miller's paintings, transforming natural elements into a means of expressing her inner world. Inspired by the elegant nature depictions of Japanese art, Miller created minimalist yet emotionally intense narratives, making nature not just a backdrop but also a representation of a spiritual journey. Like other Western contemporary artists, the symbolic power of Japanese art played a significant role in Lilian May Miller's artistic development. In ukiyo-e, figures attract attention not only through their appearance but also through their symbolic meanings. Miller adapted this symbolism from Japanese art into her own symbolist narrative, using direct symbols to express spiritual and emotional depth in her works. Thus, the figures and landscapes in Lilian May Miller's art, which use the symbolic power of Japanese print art as a language for spiritual expression, are noted to be imbued with not only aesthetic qualities but also profound symbolic meanings (Brown, 1999).

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, Japanese print art had a profound impact on Western female painters at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. The influence of Japanese print art on Western female painters shaped their artistic identities and modes of expression. Japanese aesthetics provided female painters with both technical and stylistic innovations, allowing them to develop a more personal and unique language, moving away from traditional artistic norms. The effect of Japanese print art on Western female painters highlights the role of cultural interactions in shaping artistic identities. This

interaction fostered an understanding that transcended cultural boundaries and led to significant changes in the artists' artistic production and personal identities. Female painters such as Mary Cassatt, Berthe Morisot, and Lilian May Miller embraced the aesthetic and technical characteristics of Japanese print art, reconstructing their artistic identities. This new identity created a space for freedom, contributing to the development of their art in a simple, emotional, and elegant manner. The simple narrative, bold compositions, and minimalist approach offered by Japanese art allowed Western female painters to move away from academic norms and develop more original artistic expressions. Moreover, for Western female painters, Japanese art was not only a source of inspiration but also a means of liberation against gender inequality in art. These artists, through Japonism, broke traditional moulds and pursued a more independent path in art. The aesthetic revolution of Japanese art in the West created a new realm of freedom for female painters, as it did for Impressionist artists, and allowed female painters to redefine their place in the art world.

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