

American Modernists Contemplating Asia

Reviewing the Journey of Mark Tobey and Isamu Noguchi

Weiyi Wu
School of Arts, Nanjing University
Fellow, Edith O'Donnell Institute of Art History¹
The University of Texas at Dallas

This article is dedicated to my mentor, Professor Richard R. Brettell, for his wisdom and passion that have enlightened so many, and that will be carried on by those who have been deeply touched.

The Third Mind and a Janus-faced America

In 2009, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York held an exhibition: *The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplating Asia 1860-1989*. The curator Alexandra Munroe introduces the show by saying:

*While Europe has long been recognized as the font of mainstream American art movements, the exhibition explores an alternative lineage of creative culture that is aligned with America's Pacific vista—Asia. Vanguard artists consistently looked toward “the East” to forge an independent artistic identity that would define the modern age—and the modern mind—through a new understanding of existence, nature, and consciousness.*²

An exhibition review by Andrew Solomon states that conventional wisdom by then still held that contemporary art in the East was

either derivative or unsophisticated.³ Solomon recalls that Munroe's 1994 exhibition, *Scream against the Sky: Japanese Art After 1945* was “one of the first major museum shows in New York to correct that perception.” While being interviewed for *The Third Mind* by the *Los Angeles Times*, Alexandra Munroe also emphasizes the importance of the West Coast, long overlooked in the narrative of American art history for the same reason: “Traditionally, modern and contemporary and avant-garde art have always been discussed in their relationship to Europe. The natural bias has been New York and East Coast.”⁴

Obviously, Munroe has been seeking for an alternative lineage and geography of American art history. But by no means is she the first pioneer. In fact, over fifty years before, Mark Tobey, who is also included in

¹ This research is funded by the ISAAC (Institute for the Study of American Art in China) collaboration between Nanjing University, the Edith O'Donnell Institute of Art History, and the Amon Carter Museum of American Art, with the support of the Terra Foundation for American Art.

² Munroe, A. *The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860-1989*. Guggenheim Museum, New York, January 30 to April 19, 2009.

³ Andrew Solomon, “The Third Mind,” andrewsolomon.com/articles/the-third-mind-2/ (accessed January 30, 2020)

⁴ Scarlet Cheng, “The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia: 1860-1989” at the Guggenheim,” *Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 1, 2009, www.latimes.com/entertainment/la-ca-asia1-2009feb01-story.html (accessed January 30, 2020).

The Third Mind, had already promoted America's Pacific vista by stating his view of a "Janus-faced" America in the 1946 MoMA exhibition *Fourteen Americans*:

Ours is a universal time and the significances of such a time all point to the need for the universalizing of the consciousness and the conscience of man. It is in the awareness of this that our future depends unless we are to sink into a universal dark age. ... America more than any other country is placed geographically to lead in this understanding, and if from past methods of behavior she has constantly looked toward Europe, today she must assume her position, Janus-faced, toward Asia, for in not too long a time the waves of the Orient shall wash heavily upon her shores.⁵

Fourteen Americans was one of a series of exhibitions with which MoMA aimed to promote the awareness and studies of modern art in the United States. The fact that "youth happens to be in the majority" of the selected artists in both the 1946 and 1942 shows (*Americans, 1942: 18 Artists from 9 States*) echoed the emergence of American art as a major player in the battles over the discourse power of modernism. Such an ambition of de-marginalizing and internationalizing American art is best illustrated by the curator Dorothy C. Miller's (1904-2003) introduction of *Fourteen Americans*: "The idiom is American but there is no hint of regionalism or chauvinistic tendency. On the contrary, there is a profound consciousness that the world of art is one world and that it contains the Orient no less than Europe and the Americas."⁶ This obviously resonates with Tobey's positioning of America as "Janus-faced."

⁵ Miller, Dorothy C. ed. with statements by the artists and others. 1946. *Fourteen Americans*. The Museum of Modern Art. The full text of the catalogue is accessible at www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/3196

⁶ *Fourteen Americans*. exh. cat.



Figure 1 Portrait of Teng Baiye with dedication to Mark Tobey, 1926. University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, UW 237232.

Mark Tobey's white writing—knitting the "chaos-catcher"

Mark Tobey (1890-1976) was born in Centerville, Wisconsin and educated at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (1906-1908), but he established his career in the West Coast by founding the art department at The Cornish School in Seattle, Washington in 1921. He is also known nationally as the founder of the Northwest School which includes Guy Anderson (1906-1998), Kenneth Callahan (1905-1986), and Morris Graves (1910-2001). While teaching at the Cornish, Tobey became

friends with Teng Baiye (滕圭, 字白也 1900-1980), a Chinese student who was studying at the University of Washington (Figure 1).⁷ Tobey had long been interested in mysticism. Before converting to the Bahá'í faith in 1918, he had been attracted to Eastern philosophy and spiritualism. After meeting Teng, Tobey soon started learning calligraphy under Teng's guidance. From 1929 to 1933, Teng Baiye carried on research studies at Harvard University. His dissertation focused on a survey and evaluation of looted Chinese cultural relics, for which he traveled extensively in Europe on an exchange fellowship of the Harvard-Yenching Institute. In 1925, Tobey also traveled in Europe, including a pilgrimage to the Bahá'í holy site in Haifa, and a visit to Acre to learn more about Persian and Arabian calligraphy. From 1930 to 1937 he taught art and philosophy at the Dartington Hall School in Devonshire, England. After Teng returned to China, Tobey visited him in Shanghai in 1934. During that trip, he also went to Japan, and even spent a period of time at a Zen monastery where he studied Zen painting and haiku poetry, as well as calligraphy and its philosophical underpinnings.

Calligraphy is the meta-language of traditional Chinese painting. For literati painting especially, calligraphy is the essential tool that requires day-to-day practice and takes one's lifetime to perfect. Examining the friends' biographies up to the early 1930s, Tobey could only have studied with Teng for five years at the most. It is doubtful whether Teng ever chose the copybook to teach Tobey, even though that

is the only legitimate way for any beginner of calligraphy in China. What really matters is not a good grasp of the model calligraphy but Tobey's ready embrace of cross-cultural differences: Asian art forms, compositions, skills as well as aesthetic and philosophical ideas (Figure 2). For him, Teng Baiye was a catalyst, and his own extensive travels were the fertilizer.

In 1937, Tobey left England and returned to the United States because of the increasing threat of war in Europe. He lived in Seattle until 1960. During those two decades, the influence of calligraphy first appeared in his semi-abstract cityscapes of the 1930s, and gradually gave rise to his unique technique of "white writing" with which his work became more and more abstract (Figure 3). White writing is a way of superimposing a web of white (or light-colored) calligraphic marks and symbols atop densely interwoven brushstrokes (usually in grey or dark colors). In 1944, the Willard Gallery in New York showed Tobey's white writing paintings for the first time, which officially announced his artistic breakthrough. In 1951, the Whitney Museum of American Art held a solo exhibition for Tobey, which traveled throughout the country. And in 1958, Tobey represented United States and won the first prize for painting at the 29th Venice Biennale. Following this international success, his works were shown in the documenta exhibition in Kassel (1959, 1964) and many other exhibitions around the world. In 1960 Tobey moved to Basel, Switzerland, where he died on April 24, 1976.

Mark Tobey invented the all-over composition and linear network that anticipated Jackson Pollock (1912-1956). But unlike Clement Greenberg (1909-1994) who discounted cross-cultural fertilization, Tobey always acknowledged the Eastern sources of his art. He was confident in what

⁷ No documentation shows when they met exactly. A photo of Teng Baiye given to Tobey as a gift is dated December 16, 1926. For more information, see the exhibition *Mark Tobey and Teng Baiye: Seattle/Shanghai* at the Frye Art Museum, and the book edited by Danzker, Jo-Anne Birnie and Scott Lawrimore. eds. 2014. *Mark Tobey / Teng Baiye: Seattle / Shanghai*. University of Washington Press.



Figure 2 Mark Tobey (1890-1976), *Untitled (Sumi Drawing)*, 1957. Ink on paper. Sheet: 20 3/8 x 28 1/2" (51.75 x 72.39 cm.). The Martha Jackson Collection at The Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 1974 (1974:8.37). Photo credit: Albright-Knox Art Gallery / Art Resource, NY. © 2020 Mark Tobey / Seattle Art Museum, Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

he observed from the modern life and how he should “represent” it in his art. The linear network he knitted with the white writing skill was a “chaos-catcher” (to borrow the word “dream-catcher”) he used to trap the turmoil and upheaval within the big cities. Modern artists are faced with a constantly changing reality. It only makes sense if they are also equipped with highly flexible methods and skills: “I have sought a unified world in my work and used a movable vortex to achieve it.”⁸ This “movable vortex” is also what Tobey described as “the calligraphic impulse”:

When I began grappling with sumi ink and a brush in Japan and China, trying to understand Asian calligraphy, I realized that I would never be anyone else than the Western person that I am. However, it was there that I became acquainted with what I call the calligraphic impulse, which opened up new dimensions for my work. For example I was able to paint the turmoil and upheaval within the big cities, the interplay of the lights, and the streaming crowds, trapped in the meshes of this net.⁹

This “movable vortex” is exactly what Tobey learned from calligraphy (be it Chinese, Japanese or Arabian) and Eastern aesthetics. It demonstrates the enduring

⁸ Tobey to Katharine Kuh, 28 October 1954, quoted in “Interview with Mark Tobey,” in Kuh, K. 1962. *The Artist's Voice: Talks with Seventeen Artists*. Harper & Row, p. 244.

⁹ Quoted in Mark Tobey, exh. cat. 1966. *Kestner Gesellschaft*, p.32.

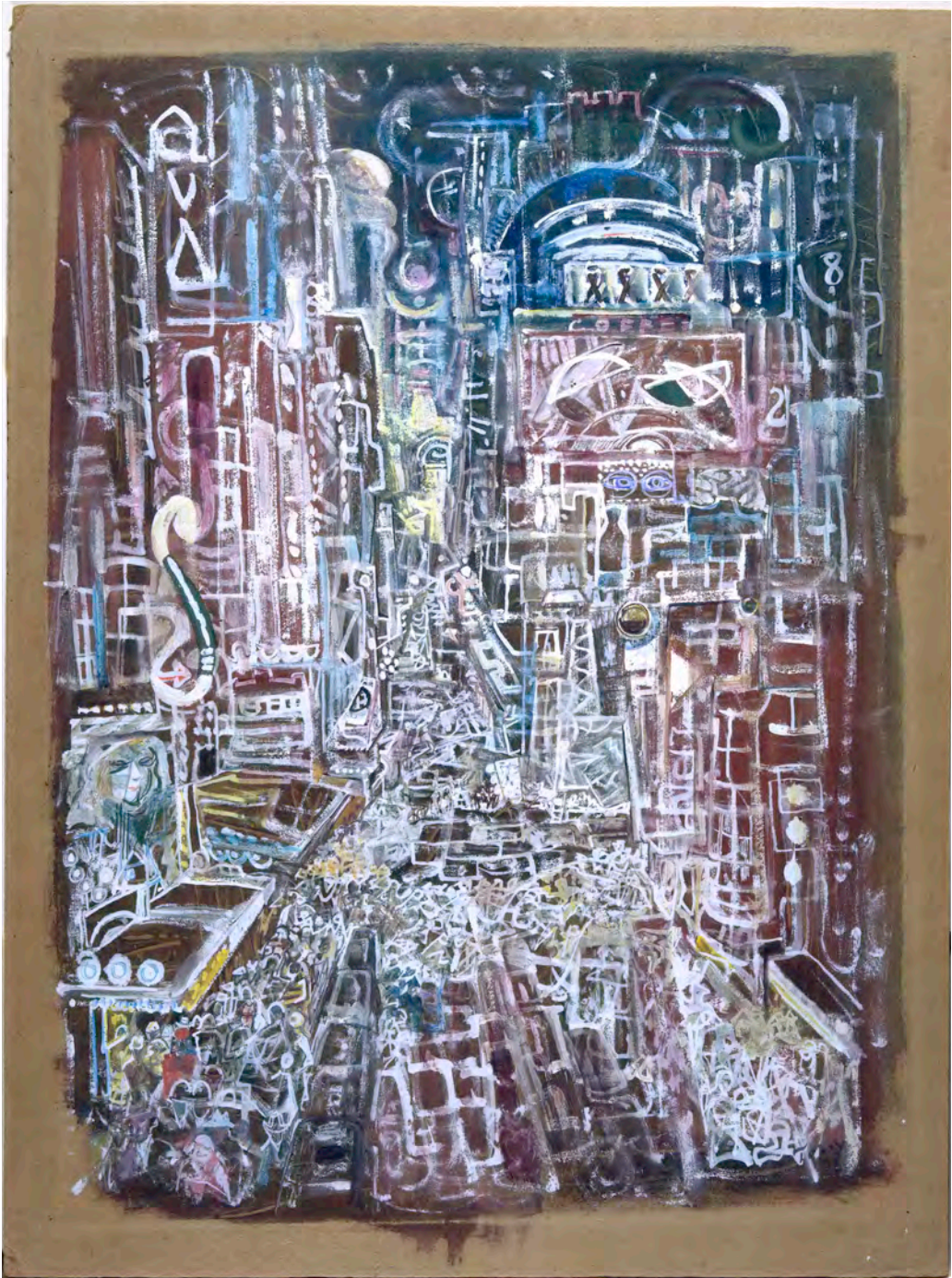


Figure 3 Mark Tobey, *Broadway*. 1935-36. Tempera on Masonite. H. 26, W. 19-1/4 inches (66 x 48.9 cm.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Arthur Hoppock Hearn Fund, 1942 (42.170). Image copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source: Art Resource, NY. © 2020 Mark Tobey / Seattle Art Museum, Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



Figure 4 Mark Tobey (1890-1976), *Lines of the City*, 1945. Tempera on paper mounted on board. 17-7/8 x 21-3/4 in. (45.5 x 55.25 cm). Bequest of Edward Wales Root, 1957.36. Photo credit: Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, MA / Art Resource, NY. © 2020 Mark Tobey / Seattle Art Museum, Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

influence of his brief association with Teng Baiye. It also explains Tobey's preference for water color, tempera, or pastel surfaces, which makes his works stand out from those of his contemporaries. The cool, refined surface and linear network consisted by calligraphic brushstrokes are just the opposite of the weighty, volumetric and definite oil painting. The "vortex" or "impulse" has its lightness, flexibility and ambivalence, all of which are ideal for Tobey's contemplative goal of expressing the mystical through art (Figure 4).

Noguchi's organic abstraction– animating the space

The keywords *impulse*, *vortex*, and *movement* link Tobey to Isamu Noguchi (1904–1988), whose works appeared in the same show, *Fourteen Americans*. In the catalogue, Noguchi explains his understanding of modern sculpture by emphasizing the importance of growth:

The essence of sculpture is for me the perception of space, the continuum of our existence. ... Since our experiences of

space are, however, limited to momentary segments of time, growth must be the core of existence. ... Thus growth can only be new, for awareness is the ever changing adjustment of the human psyche to chaos. If I say that growth is the constant transfusion of human meaning into the encroaching void, then how great is our need today when our knowledge of the universe has filled space with energy, driving us toward a greater chaos and new equilibriums. I say it is the sculptor who orders and animates space, gives it meaning.¹⁰

Isamu Noguchi was born to be what Tobey anticipated as a “Janus-faced” American artist. From the ages of 2 to 14, Noguchi was raised and educated in Japan. His mother Léonie Gilmour had to take multiple jobs as an English teacher, because Isamu’s father Noguchi Yonejirō had already re-married and started a new family before he invited them to reunite with him in Kyoto. Léonie and Yonejirō’s romantic relationship had started in New York when she was working as his proofreader and *de facto* co-author of the English poems that won him the title “the Poet Yone Noguchi.” As a scholarship student at Bryn Mawr, Léonie Gilmour was well-read and highly intelligent. She was the first one to believe that her son would be an artist and she always insisted on it, even when he was enrolled in the premed program of Columbia University. Yone Noguchi didn’t give his son much attention, except for the name “Isamu” (勇 braveness). In fact, when Isamu Noguchi wished to visit Japan in 1930, his father turned him down with a letter saying “You should not come to Japan using my name.” He went to Beijing instead, staying there from July 1930 to January 1931.

In Beijing, a Japanese friend, Sotokichi Katsuzumi, who then was working for the Yokohama Specie Bank in Beijing, showed

Noguchi his small collection of scrolls by Qi Biashi (齐白石 1864-1957). Noguchi was entranced by what he saw, and asked to be introduced to Qi, with whom he later studied with for a short period. Qi himself was just at the completion stage of his later famous “Mid-life Reformation (衰年变法).” Just as the case of Mark Tobey and Teng Baiye, little would Noguchi understand or even care about the opposition between the Four Wangs (四王) and the Four Monks (四僧) which were at the core of Qi’s reformation. Even less would Noguchi know about Chen Hengke (陈衡恪, 字师曾, 1876-1923), Lin Fengmian (林风眠 1900-1991) and Xu Beihong (徐悲鸿 1895-1953) and other of Qi’s supporters’ agendas regarding Chinese modern art. Nevertheless, Noguchi’s Beijing drawings suggest a keen observation of Qi’s masterful skills and artistry with free-spirited lines, bold brushstrokes, and a purposeful use of void space. Most importantly, the crucial connection between Qi and Noguchi is that Noguchi was also struggling at the edge of a truly great breakthrough (Figures 5 and 6).

Before planning his trip to Japan, Isamu Noguchi had a successful one-man show in New York in 1928, following his apprenticeship in Paris with the abstract sculptor Constantin Brâncuși (1876-1957). This easy success turned into an early crisis. Since he couldn’t figure out anything that Brâncuși wouldn’t or couldn’t do—in other words, there was no possible way to break free from his mentor—Noguchi simply abandoned abstract sculpture after that show. Later in his life, Noguchi recalled how Brâncuși had told him that his generation could go directly into pure abstraction, without the need to abstract from nature. Noguchi doubted whether that was really an advantage, because he always had reservations about objectivity and mechanization and inclined towards

¹⁰ *Fourteen Americans*. exh. cat. The Museum of Modern Art

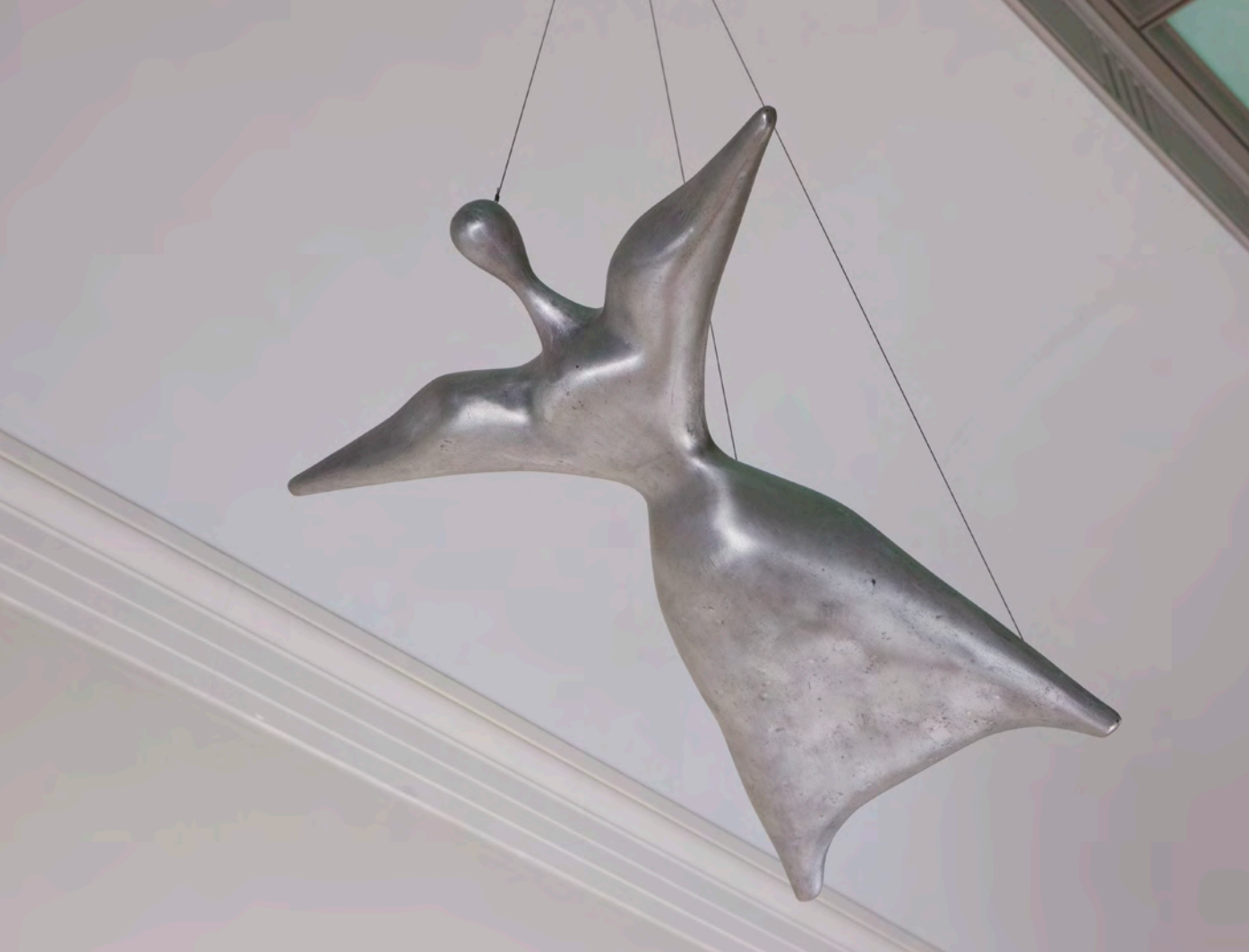


Figure 5 Isamu Noguchi, *Miss Expanding Universe*, 1932. Aluminum, 40 7/8 x 34 7/8 x 9 in. (113.9 x 88.6 x 15.2 cm). Art Institute of Chicago, Bequest of Ruth Page, 1994.833. Photo: The Art Institute of Chicago / Art Resource, NY. © 2020 The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

the organic approach to abstraction. It was with the hope of looking for his own unique way to connect nature and abstraction that Isamu Noguchi went to the East—his other cultural source.

In the first a few months in Beijing, Noguchi did drawings using pencil, charcoal and crayon. Then he used brush and ink, for a change. After he met Qi Baishi and started visiting him frequently, he adopted Qi's techniques quickly. The majority of Noguchi's Beijing drawings are nudes, which Qi never did. But the key

thing is that Noguchi got the essence of Qi's art. He captured the liveliness of his objects, using fluid and minimal lines to convey the dynamism of their movement. Interestingly, Noguchi abandoned brush and ink after exhibitions of his Beijing drawing back in America, just like what he did to Brâncuși's instructions. Nevertheless, when we compare his later works (sculptures, landscape and industry designs) with those Beijing drawings, we can see clearly that he only discarded the forms but internalized the essence and further established his



Figure 6 Isamu Noguchi, *Gregory (Effigy)*, 1946 (cast in 1964). Bronze, 69 1/8 x 16 1/8 x 16 1/2 in. (175.6 x 41 x 41.9 cm). Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Ark., 2013.42. © 2020 The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

unique visual language and philosophy. His Beijing sojourn is vital, because that was a time when he was still struggling to find his position in the already crowded sphere of modern art. A researcher, Natsu Oyobe, argues for the significant influence of Qi Baishi on Noguchi's later works:

... a crucial stage between the figural portrait heads made in New York in 1929 and the abstract terracotta sculptures made in Kyoto in 1931. ... Noguchi's own sense of abstract form finally began to emerge. It is a form, not static and polished like Brancusi's, but animated, extracted from the postures or movement of human figures and conveying the model's personality and emotional state.¹¹ (Figures 7-10)

Or, as Isamu Noguchi himself puts it: "Then, shifting to materials more natural to the place, I made enormous drawings with fantastic brushes and expressionist flourishes upon their incredibly beautiful paper."¹² Noguchi's brush drawings and Tobey's calligraphic impulse converge right at the expressionism characteristic of Chinese painting. Together and among many others, they contributed to a unique source of American modernism that is distinct from the European tradition of intellectual geometric abstraction.

Necessary cross-cultural (mis)understanding

As early as the 1930s, the Tobey and Noguchi generation of American artists had been revolting against the European model

of aloof, analyst abstraction, hoping to find an alternative approach to modernism, as well a unique visual language and legitimate identity of American modern art. From a broader perspective, it is a common approach to establish a vernacular modernism by borrowing from cultural 'others.' In *Ideographia: The Chinese Cipher in Early Modern Europe*, David Porter investigates the use of the image of China as a foil that serves to reinforce Enlightenment rationality.¹³ Similarly, Elizabeth Hope Chang argues that nineteenth-century British aesthetic engagement with China is characterized not by more "accurate" representations of China, ... but rather a "further preservation of what were thought of as Chinese ways of seeing within a modernizing British vision."¹⁴

Admittedly, Asia as the 'third mind' has been manifested as short-lived trends or recognized by the mainstream art historians as an alternative option. A decade after the Guggenheim show has passed, "the appropriation and integration of Asian sources" are still to be thoroughly reviewed. Individual cases like Mark Tobey and Isamu Noguchi indicate that it could be useful to develop a Jungian-informed art history, incorporating research on artists who absorbed and integrated Asian sources without fully comprehending their origins. It is also necessary to supplement this synchronic perspective with a diachronic one, by examining and comparing

11 Isamu Noguchi/Qi Baishi/Beijing 1930. exh. cat. 2013. The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

12 Noguchi, I. 1968. *A Sculptor's World*. Harper & Row, p. 20.

13 Porter, D. 2002. *Ideographia: The Chinese Cipher in Early Modern Europe*. Stanford University Press.

14 Chang, E. H. 2010. *Britain's Chinese Eye: Literature, Empire, and Aesthetics in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Stanford University Press, pp. 64-65.



Figure 7 Isamu Noguchi, *Seated Nude: Study in Black*, circa 1929-30. Pen and brush on cream-colored paper, 22 1/16 x 17 3/16 in. (56 x 43.7 cm). University of Michigan Museum of Art, Museum purchase, 1948/1.295. © 2020 The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

particular “missions” undertaken by artists of different historical periods. For instance, “the tension between control and composure on the one hand and spontaneity and intuition on the other. ... The striving for not only synthesis of opposites but also vitality was something Tobey had in common with many of his slightly younger contemporaries.”¹⁵

Calligraphy is one of the various answers pursued by New York modernists, as well as by those on the West Coast; it is used in different senses by Franz Kline (1910-1962)

¹⁵ The Phillips Collection, 2017. *Ten Americans after Paul Klee*, Prestel, p. 101.

and Brice Marden (born 1938). Self-reflexivity thus becomes crucial to art historians. This means to uncover those buried facts and clues, based on a serious reflection on the mythology of a linear progressive modernism. From the perspective of global art history, the appeal for an alternative modernism or multiple modernisms would make no sense if researchers do not envisage the polyphony on the periphery as well as in the centers. Through treating the vernacular in their own rights rather than as sources or inspirations, we could hope to get closer to the historical configuration of a shared modernism.

Envisage the polyphony through communicative comparisons

From this perspective, it is clear that the foregoing anecdotes in fact demand and enable a theoretical imagination of the polyphony, which requires a re-examination of Tobey’s and Noguchi’s Asia by uncovering the course of modernization as visualized by Asian artists and intellectuals.

Fang Wen (方闻1930-2018)’s student Shi Shouqian (石守谦) criticizes the “impact-response” model followed by generations of art historians from Michael Sullivan (1916-2013) to Craig Clunas.¹⁶ He argues that for renovators like Xu Beihong, Lin Fengmian, and Chen Hengke, “western influences” served ultimately as a starting point for their inquiries of “the essence of (Chinese) painting”, rather than as a destination of their respective reforms. By comparing these renovators’ strategies and experimentations, Shi Shouqian points out that their artistic explorations were deeply intertwined with and often troubled by a common anxiety of cultural reconstruction

¹⁶ See Shi, Shouqian 2015. *From Style to Huayi: Reminiscing on Chinese Art History* (《从风格到画意：反思中国美术史》 Cong fengge dao huayi: fansi zhongguo meishushi). SDX Joint Publishing Company. pp. 385-87.

and national salvation in the early 20th century China. Thus, in a more general sense, Shi concludes that questions about the vernacular are characterized by complex and ambivalent artists-audiences and art-society relations which ought to be analyzed in the context of the particular country or area in question. With that vision, Shi presents his explanation for the frustrated artistic reforms which is distinct from his predecessors' viewpoints:

During the early years of the Republic of China, the cultural environment was undergoing unprecedented changes. As a consequence of reforms in education and value systems, the symbiosis of art and culture was suddenly deprived from its soil.... There was a lack of interaction between renovators of artistic styles and leading figures in the cultural field, which eventually resulted in increasing departmentalism and mutual repulsion. The debate of artistic reform degraded into "private issues" within small groups, draining its possibility of receiving resonance from the wider cultural environment.... The tortuous process of artistic reform since Xu Beihong was largely because of its disconnection with the cultural environment.¹⁷

His interpretation of the modern history of Chinese art could be compared with those of other art historians including James Cahill (1926-2014), Max Loehr (1903-1988), Teng Gu (滕固 1901-1941) and Lu Fusheng (卢辅圣). While being viewed together, their divergent approaches all point to one fact that the art-culture relation lies in the very center of a critical historiography of Chinese art. Indeed, it is the interaction between artistic creation and its cultural environment that bridges the gap between the alleged exterior and interior studies of art.

17 Shi, Shouqian. 2018. *Styles and Changes: Ten Treatises on Chinese Painting* (《风格与世变：中国绘画十论》 Fengge yu shibian: zhongguo huihua shi jiang) Beijing University Press, p.15. This excerpt is translated from the Chinese edition by the writer of this article.



Figure 8 Isamu Noguchi, *Baby: Scroll (Kakemono)*, 1930. Brush, ink and wash on white paper, 66 ½ x 30 ½ in. (168.91 x 77.47 cm). University of Michigan Museum of Art, Gift of Sotokichi Katsuizumi, 1949/1.190. © 2020 The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

This leads us back to the foregoing discussion of American modernism. Andrew Hemingway questions the process of aesthetic filtration implied in the historical study of art. His critique echoes Shi Shouqian's argument with respect to the problematic historiography of a single, universal modernism:

How do we decide whether an artwork addresses history in a compelling way? Surely this is not something we can understand intuitively (as in judgements of taste), but rather something we can only arrive at through a complex historical argument.... Or are art and history so universal that the differences between particular national cultural formations are irrelevant, and a Corot will always count for more than an Inness, wherever, whenever?¹⁸

18 Hemingway, Andrew. 2009. American art pre-1940 and the problem of art history's object. in Groseclose, B. and Jochen Wierich eds. *Internationalizing the History of American Art*. The Pennsylvania State University Press, pp. 78-79.

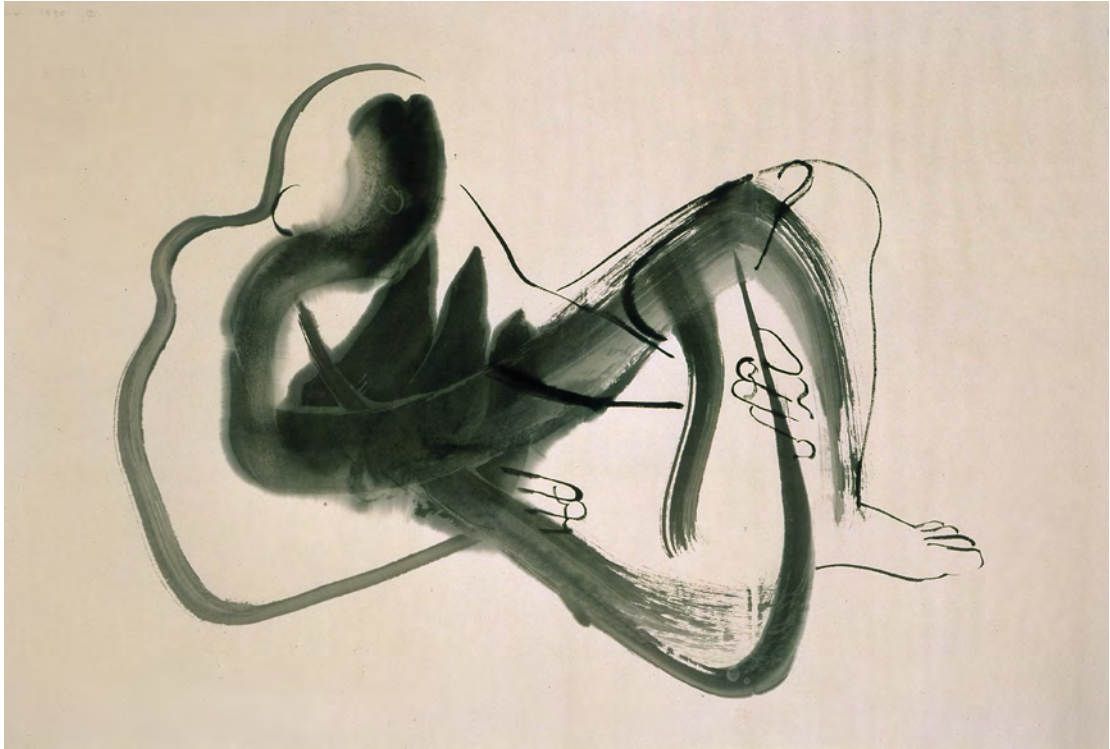


Figure 9 Isamu Noguchi, *Peking Drawing*, 1930. Ink on paper, 35 1/8 x 57 1/2 in. (89.2 x 146.1 cm). The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York Museum. © 2020 The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

This long-standing prejudice against American art also indicates what is missing in Shi Shouqian's sympathetic retrospection of Chinese modernists: modern art as well as the discipline of art history have both been interwoven with conceptions of the nation state since their very beginning. In the same book that includes Hemingway's article, editors Barbara Groseclose and Jochen Wierich reveal the "growing-up narration" of American art history and further traces its origin back to the dichotomy of "European model – American characteristics".¹⁹ These studies explain

19 Groseclose, B. and Jochen Wierich eds. 2009. *Internationalizing the History of American Art*. The Pennsylvania State University Press, pp. 7-9.

why the much-delayed art and cultural independence of the United States would take the form of the triumph of American modernism. The resultant "Paris-New York" axis has proven to be a continuation of the teleology, which is not disturbed by postcolonial discourses but only surfaces as one of the symptoms of globalization.²⁰

But how was the teleology of a single modernism established originally? This question couldn't be fully resolved from a longitudinal perspective only. As exemplified by the resonance between American and Chinese modernism, teleological narratives

20 Moxey, Keith. 2006. Art history after the global turn, in James Elkins ed. *Is Art History Global?* Routledge, p. 208.



Figure 10 Isamu Noguchi, *Sunken Garden*, Chase Manhattan Bank Plaza, 1961-64. Exterior design with water, natural stones. Photo by Arthur Lavine, 1965. © The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

could be deconstructed through an exploration of the spatial dimension of art history. Within the context of American art, this involves not only differences between New York, the West Coast, the Southwest and many others, but also nuances of each

local art ecology. Most importantly, in order to avoid fragmented trivialization, the spatial exploration has to be driven by a communicative purpose. Perhaps it is time that we embark on the journey that Tobey and Noguchi had pointed out for us. ㄱ