The Seven Fortunes And The Sev Essay, Research Paper

A significant work of Japanese art that is of particular interest is the hand scrolls The Seven Fortunes and the Seven Misfortunes by Maruyama Okyo of the Edo period. These scrolls by Okyo are a pictorial explanation of the real-life blessings and evils that, according to Buddhist philosophy, result from previous Karma (Mason 280). The Seven Fortunes and the Seven Misfortunes is comprised of three scrolls totaling 150 feet in length by 12 1/4 inches high. For the purpose of this paper, I will focus on the two scrolls containing the misfortunes .

The two scrolls that illustrate the Seven Misfortunes show disastrous events inflicted on man and mankind by nature and by humans. They were commissioned in 1768 by the Emmann Temple outside of Kyoto to explain the Buddhist Karma beliefs. Okyo painted realistic scenes for every misfortune or evil of the Buddhist philosophy Earthquake, flood, fire, onis, war, robbery, and sickness (Joly 378). Maruyama Okyo was a master of realism, a technique adopted from outside influences (especially the Dutch), which became popular during the Edo period. The realistic qualities conveyed in Okyo s images of the Seven Misfortunes are moving and frightening.

One particular painting in the scrolls shows with vivid detail the demise of an unfortunate man. This man is naked, with a fierce bull on either side of him. The man s legs have been tied to one hind leg of each bull, and their tails have been set on fire. We can imagine the bulls bucking wildly as the man s fragile body is torn apart from the great force of the furious bulls. Blood spurts from the torn cavity of the man s chest as he screams in terror while the bulls run in wild agony, as flames spread from their tails up towards their hinds. Just by looking at this painting, one can imaging the scene actually coming to life. This scene is painted with tremendous energy, it truly seems like a terrifying frozen moment in time.

Another scene in the Seven Misfortunes that displays Okyo s mastery of realism is The Flood. In this misfortune, a treacherous typhoon is engulfing a village. The village people are being thrown about in the water, the expressions on their faces express the terror and helplessness that they feel. They are no match for the monstrous waves that are thrashing them about. An additional example of the realistic interpretations of the misfortunes is Okyo s illustration of The Fire. Towering flames engulf a village as the villagers try to escape, running in terror. Flames lick the bodies of the helpless people as the run in vain, for they can t escape the wrath of the fire.

Scenes like these show how Okyo used his mastery of the traditional elements of the decorative style and his unique use of them to achieve greater naturalism (Mason 280). The traditional styles that Okyo demonstrates can be seen throughout the scrolls. The use of texture is well demonstrated in the illustrations, variations in line width energize each painting. The quick, precise brush strokes give each scene life, even though they are on one-dimensional paper. Short brush strokes or quick dabs show texture for the elements in each scene. The faces of the people in each scene are painted in detail though they are often tiny, we can see the expressions on their faces.Okyo pays close attention to detail The waves painted in the typhoon scene flow like actual water, and yet the body of water seems to be a being in itself, consuming the village people. The flames painted in The Fire are also rendered realistically, variations in line create a sense of spatial depth and texture. The flames seem to possess a spirit of their own as they engulf the village people.

Okyo s ability to combine Western influences of realism and his own personal style into The Seven Misfortunes made his work stand out against the rest of the art being produced in Japan during that time period. The use of realism in the rendering of the scrolls was necessary for the nature of their purpose; for Buddhism is based on simplicity, and the Emmanin temple that commissioned these works wanted something to display to their Buddhist followers that would demonstrate the results of Karma and how it relates to real life. The scrolls are …remarkable for their truthful power; for them Okyo apparently drew the human figure from life. (Japanese Painting). The Seven Fortunes and the Seven Misfortunes are just one example of the artist s objective style of Japanese painting. All of Okyo s works are examples in realism created from the Maruyama-Shijo school that he founded.

Maruyama Okyo (1733 1795), was the son of a farmer who left the farm and moved to Kyoto.

There he made a place for himself among the chonin, which was the artesian and merchant classes that formed the main urban population in the Edo period. He started out as an apprentice to a clothing shop and then a toy maker, for whom he painted dolls (Maruyama Okyo). He eventually undertook formal training as a painter, since he showed a talent for art. Okyo s teacher, Ishida Yutei was a painter in the style of the Kano School, which used touches of realism. He inherited his teacher s interest in diverse painting styles, and in his late teens Okyo also studied Dutch prints, learning the principles of linear perspective and modeling the human form (Maruyama Okyo). The Dutch influence of perspective is not very apparent in The Seven Misfortunes, but in Okyo s other works he implements this modern technique.

Okyo later expanded on his teacher s techniques when he started his own school. Okyo eventually created the Maruyama Shijo school in the middle of the Edo period at Kyoto. His school …attached much importance to the naturalistic depiction of nature and urban scenes in the environs of Kyoto (Japanese Painting). The result of Okyo s studying the concept of perspective became an important factor in the realistic portrayal of everyday life and landscapes. Though there were other schools operating in Kyoto during the Edo period, including the Kano and Tosa, the Maruyama school was known for naturalistic expressions in the works of its artists. Okyo brought to Kyoto for the first time an expressionistic style that satisfied the demands of ordinary urban dwellers. (Japanese Painting). Thus, Okyo created his own personal style that influenced later artists of the Edo period.

Okyo s paintings appealed to ordinary people s senses and emotions as they were fresh and new, unlike the tired, repetitive work of the older Kyoto schools. He was an ambitious and scholarly artist, researching the techniques of the European artists such as chairoscuro (Katabokashi in Japanese), and Tsuketate, a Japanese word for depiction of an object without contour lines (Japanese Painting). The Tsuketate shading method eventually became one of the trademarks of the Maruyama Shijo school, along with the implementation of perspective.

Okyo was one of the first Japanese artists of the Edo period to incorporate the concept of underlying bone structure in creating his figures. This was obviously another Western influence reflected in his work. He is known to have studied foreign texts on surgery and the human form (Maruyama Okyo). This is apparent when looking at The Seven Misfortunes, where Okyo clearly defines his human figures with naturalistic accuracy. The artist s ability to render his illustrations in such a way while still conveying the emotional aspect is truly a great feat. Unlike the other artist of the time, Okyo could relate to the viewer and he knew how to grab their attention. He played an important role in moving Japanese art forward during the Edo period.

Okyo s success is a result of many factors His ability to relate to the common people while still using scientific methods, the ability of a painting to get an emotional reaction from the viewer, and the sheer simplicity of his work. My response to the work of Maruyama Okyo is that of awe. Once I began to really research this artist, I learned that he is indeed an important person in the history of Japanese art. The illustration in Mason s textbook of the bulls and the naked man intrigued me and made me want to learn more about the subject of the Seven Fortunes and Seven Misfortunes. I was not able to find pictures of the entire 150 feet of hand scrolls, but I did manage to find pictures of a couple of scenes from the work. Each painting in the scrolls is painted with such spirit and energy. The intention of the scrolls was to convince Buddhist pupils to continue on their journey, and I think that the scrolls probably succeeded. The scenes painted on the scrolls are not impossible situations, the misfortunes depicted can (and have) taken place. Thus when viewing the scrolls the viewer gets a jolt of reality, a message that the situations could actually happen to them.

I think that even though now in the present-day art world paintings can look so realistic that you may be fooled into believing that something you see is actually real, Okyo did indeed succeed in his quest to realistically present the situations not only in The Seven Fortunes and Seven Misfortunes but also in the remainder of his work during his lifetime.

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