

Wabi Sabi, Mono no Aware, and Ma: Tracing Traditional Japanese Aesthetics through Japanese History

Lauren Prusinski

Departmental Affiliation:
Christ College

A nation originally built on Chinese tradition, Japan has gradually developed its own cultural standards and definitions of beauty. Japan has always focused on beauty in all realms of its culture: in its arts, such as poetry and calligraphy; rituals, such as the ancient tea ceremony; and in contemporary Japanese urban life, consumer goods and architecture. Japanese society has revolved around a keen awareness of nature as it relates to these aspects of life and has focused on this conscious sensibility of nature through aesthetics, including *wabi sabi*, a rustic and often desolate beauty, *mono no aware*, an awareness of a fleeting beauty, and *ma*, an empty or formless beauty. These aesthetics have permeated the Japanese culture from their roots in the Heian era at the end of the 8th century through contemporary Japan. With a keen eye for their surroundings, the Japanese have effectively melded ancient aesthetics with modern advancement, remaining deferential to their natural roots by highlighting rather than diminishing their eternal presence in society. Though urban development has extended its reach to the base of the Kyoto mountainside, the high number of temples and gardens scattered amidst its municipal areas still exemplifies Japan's relationship with nature. Though advances in technology have made the Japanese less reliant on nature, the Japanese have maintained this appreciation for the role nature still plays in an industrial setting, recognizing that technology cannot eliminate nature, therefore creating a harmonious balance between human and nature.

Information about the Author:

Lauren Prusinski wanted to compose her Christ College honors thesis about "Urban Japan: Past and Present." Thus, she began researching topics that pertained to the breadth of both past and present urban Japanese culture, using her knowledge about the Japanese culture to relate to her observations of their cultural significance. A double major in biochemistry and Chinese and Japanese Studies, she will be pursuing a dual degree in the University System of Georgia's MD/PhD program beginning in the summer of 2013.

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Jeni Prough

Student Contact: lauren.prusinski@valpo.edu