

Notes on John Matsudaira

- Matsudaira was friends with and studied under Jacob Elshin and Paul Horiuchi
- Matsudaira knew and was familiar with the work of Mark Tobey and Morris Graves (abstract expressionism and Cezanne figured strongly in their work)
- Both Jacob Elshin and Paul Horiuchi were strongly influenced by Cezanne (Paul took his name from Paul Cezanne):
- Cezanne painted in the late 19th C and influenced modern painters. His style was very realistic at first but he began to emphasize shapes such as rectangles, cones, and circles. Although he was never completely abstract he had a strong influence on the abstract painters of the early 20th Century.
- Japanese American artists were very familiar with the Japanese brush painting technique of Sumi-e and often took lessons as children:
- Sumi-e painting: The artist must learn to use ink freely with a controlled brush stroke. They must be able to capture the essence or spirit of the subject in their paintings. To evoke a poetry of nature, brush painters create beautiful lines and forms by means of brush strokes using a number of techniques and methods to bring life to the subject. Themes from nature are the subject matter, but brush painters do not try to imitate, copy or master nature.
- Mark Tobey was a world renowned abstract expressionist painter.
- Abstract Expressionism was a strong American movement that started in the late 40s with Jackson Pollock.
- In Abstract expressionism what was to go on the canvas was not an image but an event.
- John Matsudaira worked at Boeing as a graphic designer and learned precise, detailed illustration
- John Matsudaira was profoundly interested in nature and natural images

Tour Script—30-minute tour

Statement of Theme: We are going to examine influences on John Matsudaira’s art and how these influences changed his style over time

Jacob Elshin Mural Study depicting construction of the Grand Coulee Dam, 1938

Questions: is this realistic or abstract

Do you see any strong shapes in the image (squares, rectangles)?

State: Jacob Elshin was Matsudaira’s friend and teacher and was strongly influenced by Cezanne who is one of the most influential artists of modern art. Cezanne painted realistically but used unusual perspective and emphasized shape and strong outlines.

Transition: lets view another artist who influenced Matsudaira

Mark Tobey: Untitled, circa 1950

Questions: is this realistic or abstract?

What stands out to you most in this painting? (color, shape, texture)

State: Mark Tobey is known for his abstract expressionist style. This style developed in the US after WWII and influenced many painters including Mark Tobey who was an innovator in this style. John Matsudaira knew Mark Tobey and was familiar with this style.

Transition: lets view one last artist and style who influenced Matsudaira

Paul Horiuchi: Portrait of John Matsudaira

Questions: Is this realistic or abstract

What medium is being used in this image (ink)

State: Paul Horiuchi was a close friend and mentor to John Matsudaira. Both were members of the Japanese American community in Seattle and both had been taught traditional Sumi-e brush painting. You can see this portrait is done with brush and ink and has strong expressive strokes but is simple in its execution. General Sumi-e themes are found in nature and artists strive to portray a natural process in their painting.

Transition: Now let's examine how these artists and styles influenced John Matsudaira's style over time

John Matsudaira: Port at Night, 1948

Question: Which of the artworks we saw does this most resemble? (Elshin)

What does it have in common with Elshin and Cezanne? (realism but with strong outlines and shapes, similar color palette)

State: John won an award with this painting and it brought him recognition as an artist, it was done in 1948 and one of his earliest paintings in this exhibit. You can see the strong influence of his teacher Jacob Elshin in this work and many that John painted at this time.

Transition: let's move forward in time a decade and see how John's style evolved

John Matsudaira: Young Growth, 1959

Question: Which of the artworks we saw does this most resemble (Tobey)

What does it have in common with Tobey's work and Abstract Expressionism? (abstract forms, strong brush stroke, action like quality).

Can you make out any realistic images in this work (plants and natural forms)?

Which art style emphasizes natural forms? (Sumi-e)

State: John's artwork became more abstract during this period of time as did many artists in the US. He personally was very interested in nature and natural forms.

Transition: Let's see his final and most mature artworks. He employed a number of techniques that he combined into one final form.

John Matsudaira: Untitled (Mandala Shape), 1983

Question: Which artwork does this most resemble? (Sumi-e, Tobey?)

What does it have in common with the Sumi-e portrait? (use of ink)

What about it might remind you of an engineering plan at Boeing? (precise Shapes and details)

State: John worked as a graphic designer at Boeing for many years. He enjoyed producing very precise ink drawing that show shapes and images from nature.

John Matsudaira: Nature, Form & Movement, 1978

Examine this painting closely

Questions: What elements resemble: Elshin, Tobey, Sumi-e, Boeing engineers? (Shapes, abstraction, natural forms, brush strokes, precise detailed forms)

Conclusion: In this image you can see all the influences of his life coming together in one unique art. (Refer to pink unfinished painting) He started with abstract splotches of color. Then he laboriously drew in black ink and white ink, like in Sumi-e—detailed natural forms and shapes. There are several examples of this style in this room.

You will see many more examples of John's style in this exhibit and will see how his style evolved over time. Enjoy the rest of the exhibit