The Iconography of Animism and Anime
Amy Schlegel, Ph.D., Director of Galleries and Collections and Exhibition Co-Curator

Sacred Monsters:
Everyday Animism in Contemporary Japanese Art and Anime
September 10 to November 22, 2009
Public Opening Reception, Thurs., September 17, 5:30-8:00pm

This exhibition examines representations of mythical spirits, gods, monsters, and other sentient beings in contemporary Japanese art and film as expressions of animist belief through the work of eight emerging and mid-career artists.

What makes contemporary Japanese visual culture so “glocal” and so compelling to look at and study? One answer to this global-local appeal lies in the connection between animism, the basis of Japanese Shintoism and mythology, and the quintessentially postmodern art form of *anime* (animated film), an industry dominated by the Japanese, who have over the past 25 years spearheaded “a genuinely new form of global culture,” says Tufts professor and *anime* expert Susan J. Napier. At the heart of this connection are the concepts of metamorphosis (the transformation from one order and state of being to another) and of cross-pollination.

Brian Kneip: Exempla
Interview by Amy Schlegel, Ph.D., Director of Galleries and Collection and Exhibition Curator

This recognized Boston new media artist has created six related, interactive projections. In each work, hundreds of creatures are tasked with achieving a goal that proves futile yet revealing of complex social interactions. Kneip’s work bridges art and science through his hypothetical microcosms of “emergent behavior” to create a kind of digital arena in which viewers activate a light source and their shadows play a decisive role in a philosophical game of illumination and illusion.

The pieces are more about futility than emergence. The works use child-like drawings to examine the illusions that drive us, in a humorous way. The creatures, with their huge, exaggerated...
Beautiful Obsessions: A Review of Art Basel Miami, 12/2008
Ken Aidekman, Gallery Advisory Board Co-Chair and Circle Member

Art Basel Miami, or any large-scale art fair for that matter, can be overwhelming. To take something valuable from the experience, it helps to take a step back and focus on a segment or trend that leaves an indelible impression. In December of 2008 obsessive art appeared to be one such area.

Obsessive art is nothing new. There have always been artists obsessed with detail, super accurate representation or precise, inventive line. Outsider artists, in particular, have demonstrated a compulsive dedication to complex geometric patterns and repetition in their work. But, for a number of reasons, obsessive drawing and painting have re-emerged as a serious genre for today’s artists.

Two artists who showed with Johansson Projects at Art Basel Miami are representative of current trends in obsessive art.

Jill Gallenstein (see website: JillGallenstein.com) toils away quietly in Columbus, Ohio where she teaches at the Headlands Center for the Arts. Her work is a potpourri of elegant circles, stars, snowflakes and delicate strings of ink on drawn on paper. Like other artists who venture into obsessive art, she shows a near limitless imagination. Her work renews one’s enthusiasm for the endless possibilities of the human spirit. Gallenstein’s line encompasses emergence, growth, order and entropy. One may search for deeper meaning, but even as pure abstraction these drawings are satisfyingly complex.

Tadashi Moriyama is a Brooklyn artist who spins a web of complex connections by organically multiplying artificial building blocks of houses and roadways. The effect is a claustrophobic environment where all the activities of men and women are represented by the elaborate ‘hives’ in which they live and work. The images have a crazy cartoon feel from the perspective of aerial photography, but at the same time they bring to mind magnified cross-sections of multi-cellular structures. There exists a push and pull between oppressive human congestion and the greater organism of mass society. Moriyama’s drawings and watercolors are well represented on the Internet along with his unique animated films (see the website: johanssonprojects.com)

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Who lives on a cliff. After taking a great liking to her, Sōsuke names her Ponyo and vows to protect her forever.

3 Napier, ibid., p. 185.
4 Email communication to author, July 16, 2009.

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Circle Calendar of Events

Thursday, September 10, 2009
Fall Dinner in celebration of Sacred Monsters: Everyday Animism in Contemporary Japanese Art and Anime, Brian Kneip: Examples, and Tadashi Moriyaama: Flight Home
7:00 pm  Precinct
7:30 pm  Dinner
For Expressionist ($1,000) supporters only and other exhibition participants. Please check your mail for an invitation; RSVP by 8/31 to contemporaryartcircle@tufts.edu

Thursday, September 17, 2009
Public Opening Reception for fall exhibitions
6:00 pm  Artist's Talk with Brian Kneip
7:00pm  Tour of Sacred Monsters with a Voice Your Vision! Guide

Wednesday, October 14, 2009
Tour of Orna Shulman’s collection (See her article On Collecting on page 13)
See our website for more details and to register online

Saturday, October 17, 2009
Tour of Frieze Art Fair, London with Amy Schlegel
Email Amy with inquiries (amy.schlegel@tufts.edu)

December 2-5, 2009
Event in conjunction with ArtBasel Miami Beach.
See our website for more details and to register online

See artgallery.tufts.edu for a full calendar of Gallery exhibitions and events.

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Diane Burko
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The Value of Art
Andrew McClellan, Dean of Academic Affairs and Professor of Art History, Tufts University

On March 26, the Tufts University Art History Department sponsored the panel discussion and community conversation: The Value of Art: The Place of Art in the University Today
Panelists:
James Ennes, David Guss, Andrew McClellan, Peter Probst, and Amy Ingrid Schlegel
Moderator:
Eva Hoffman

In late March 2009 the newspapers reminded us that nineteen years ago the infamous Gardner heist deprived us of much beloved art by Rembrandt, Vermeer, Manet and others worth many millions of dollars. By stipulation of Mrs. Gardner’s will, the empty frames must remain hanging on the walls to remind us of our loss. But what is the nature of our loss? What is it we mourn? For more than a century we in the West have been conditioned to view art museums as havens of mankind’s expressive spirit and the works of art they hold as timeless symbols of our transcendent yearning for ineffable beauty. Whatever rituals may once have animated a museum’s varied contents, whatever their past function or monetary worth, museum pieces shed their former identities to become timeless and priceless masterpieces. Their value henceforth is fundamentally to tell us who we are, where we have come from, and something about our ideals and aspirations. There is a communal aspect to the silent communing we do with precious fragments of our shared human past. The ritual alchemy of the museum transforms an eclectic collection of objects, whose past functions may be imperfectly understood and whose meanings elusive, into a vehicle for profound contemplation of human creativity. For these reasons, the theft or vandalism of a museum work of art is felt as an assault on our collective identity, our shared past and values; in short, on our humanity.

A generation of art historians, anthropologists, and assorted academics have labored to recover art’s ritual functions and socio-historic identity without significantly impacting how museums operate or what the public expects from them. At the same time, I’m led to wonder how much the general public cares about the individual works of art they see on their museum visits. With respect to the Gardner, for example, I wonder if we feel the theft’s effect more intensely, or even at all, simply because the empty frames remind us of what is no longer there; if the gaps were filled with other things and no mention was made of the theft, would we notice or remember the missing works? It’s hard to say which we feel more: the loss of those specific works or the anti-social assault on an institution dedicated to the public good?

If we move on to consider the Brandeis debacle, how would it have played if instead of calling for the wholesale dispersal of the Rose Art Museum collection, they had selectively sold just a few of the more valuable pieces in order to save the greater part of the collection and the Rose itself? Unlike the Gardner, the Rose could have filled the gaps and most visitors would have been none the wiser. Purists, of course, would accept no subtractions; de-accessioning is immoral and worse than theft because voluntarily undertaken. The American Association of Museum Directors has condemned museums that de-accession in the same way institutions black-balled South Africa during apartheid.
Book Review: Seven Days in the Art World by Sarah Thornton
Laura Roberts, Gallery Advisory Board Co-Chair, Circle Member, and Faculty in the Tufts Museum Studies Program

Although I have worked in [history] museums for 35 years, visit galleries, and live with art, I must confess to be a real neophyte when it comes to the art world, particularly the world of contemporary art. So I picked up Seven Days in the Art World by Sarah Thornton with great anticipation, hoping it would fill in the gaps. The seven chapters cover seven composite “days,” although the research covered far more time: a contemporary art auction at Christie’s, a student “crit” at CalArts, the Venice Biennal, Art Basel, a visit to Murakami’s studios, the awarding of the Turner Prize, and a day at Artforum. Thornton is an ethnographer (her prior work was on the London club scene) and she approaches her task as both a scholar and a voyeur. The result is a somewhat gossipy, always revealing, insider’s look. It is an easy, entertaining, and satisfying book.

In the introduction, Thornton writes that “the contemporary art world is what Tom Wolfe would call as ‘statusphere.’ It’s structured around nebulous and often contradictory hierarchies of fame, credibility, imagined historical importance, institutional affiliation, education, perceived intelligence, wealth and attributes such as the size of one’s collection.” Nevertheless, she clearly had a wonderful time researching the book over three years and does, at times, lose her critical eye. (She also writes for the online version of Artforum and is, therefore, no doubt reluctant to be too controversial.)

The book begins with one of the best chapters: the Christie’s auction. Following the nervous but skillful auctioneer from rehearsal through the auction, the reader is immediately drawn into the drama of the scene. This chapter also held the most surprises for me, outlining the differences between sales through primary galleries, secondary galleries and auctions. Although the market may have cooled since 2004, the not-so-subtle politics and economics of the system astounded me. The other chapter to examine the commercial art market, on Art Basel (researched in 2006), only reinforces that impression. With so many wealthy collectors vying for a small number of prime works, meeting the asking price is the lowest hurdle a potential buyer must clear. “When gallerists are confident about demand for an artist’s work, they wouldn’t dream of surrendering it to the first comer or the highest bidder. They compile a list of interested parties so they can place the work in the most prestigious home. It’s an essential part of managing the perception of their artists. Unlike other industries where buyers are anonymous and interchangeable, here artists’ reputations are enhanced or contaminated by the people who own their work.”

The two chapters on critical review, the “crit” of student work at CalArts and the day spent with academic and journalistic critics in and around Artforum, approached but eventually skirted a common theme: the difficulty of understanding and talking about contemporary art. As one writer explained it, “you need to have a complex language to deal with complex ideas. So there is a justification for all that footnoted, highfalutin

Alumna Profile – Nina Bozicnik
MA ’08, Art History (Contemporary Art from the Americas) and Museum Studies Written by Jeanne Koles, Staff writer

Since graduating in May 2008, Nina Bozicnik has jumped feet first into the art world but she maintains a strong relationship with her alma mater. Nina came to Tufts because the program was academically rigorous and committed to teaching best practices to museum professionals. She admired the faculty, noting modern and contemporary Latin American art culture professor Adriana Zavala as a special draw.

Her two years at Tufts solidified her instinct about Tufts and she notes numerous aspects of her experience that made it exceptional—from “developing a community of intellectual investigation and exploration with my colleagues” to “sharing knowledge through intimate seminars and one-on-one mentorship.” On a summer trip to Cuba to do research for her qualifying paper on The Carpenters, a Cuban artist’s collective, she gained a deep passion for an under-explored aspect of contemporary art history. Nina’s passion, curiosity, initiative, and conviction were molded and supported by her time at Tufts.

Empire and Its Discontents Publication Wins Big
The Tufts University Art Gallery’s publication Empire and Its Discontents (published in conjunction with the fall 2008 exhibition of the same name) took top honors in two important museum publication competitions.

In the American Association of Museum’s 2009 Publication Design Competition, Empire took First Place for organizations with a budget under $500,000. AAM said “a consistent tone, playful imagery and a good use of space make this a page-turner.”

The annual New England Museum Association Publication Awards Program “recognizes excellence in design, production, and effective communication in all aspects of museum publishing.” Empire, which was designed by Paul Sheriff (Sheriff Design, Philadelphia) took top honors, winning “First Place in Exhibition Catalogues over $10” and taking “Best in Show.” The catalogue will be displayed at the annual NEMA conference in November. Beautiful publications like Empire and Its Discontents are made possible by the generous gifts of our Circle supporters. Empire and Its Discontents is distributed by D.A.P. in New York and is for sale through the Gallery for $25. See our website (artgallery.tufts.edu) for ordering instructions.
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(a hybridized cultural product incorporating both Japanese and western influences).

The Tufts University Art Gallery has teamed up with Tufts Professors Charles Shirō Inouye, Hosea Hirata and Napier, all experts in modern and contemporary Japanese literature and culture, to organize the exhibition Sacred Monsters: Everyday Animism in Contemporary Japanese Art and Anime (September 10 to November 22). It explores how ancient animist belief—that all things are alive and animated by divine spirits—persists in contemporary anime and visual art. Together with Gallery Graduate Assistant Jonathan Barracato, I (Amy Schlegel, Gallery Director) selected 23 works by eight Japanese artists; Napier also selected eight anime by five directors.

Our exhibition starts from the premise that animist beliefs, deities and mythology are so widely embraced that although the Japanese do not regard themselves as religious, they observe the rituals and festivals associated with this ancient religion native to Japan. Many contemporary Japanese visual artists and animators both implicitly and explicitly incorporate animist beliefs in their work as cultural rather than religious expression.

“Ancient religious practice in Japan was animistic, polytheistic, and shamanistic,” writes Inouye in his 2008 book Evanescent and Form: An Introduction to Japanese Culture. “Their world was animated by divine powers that were present. Some were benign, others threatening. . . . In many ways, the barriers between human and divine beings were porous, even to the point that the supernatural world was the natural world . . . . This was true anciently. This remains true today.”

A shared iconography connects the artists and anime included in the exhibition, ranging from kami (gods) to yokai (monsters), sentient and non-sentient beings with supernatural powers, and hybrid mythical creatures. These traditionally Japanese representations—visible, tangible, and ubiquitous, rather than invisible, ethereal, and rarified—bedevil categorization and actively dissolve boundaries between the visible and invisible, the living and the dead, the human and the non-human realms.

Digital artist Chiho Aoshima (b. 1974, Tokyo) represents this continuum nicely. Aoshima’s anime-inspired work evokes a gothic realm of spirits and monsters that are neither anthropomorphic things or animals nor distorted, grotesque humans.

For example, the Shinto goddess Amaterasu has been reimagined as an anime heroine (i.e., child-like, non-Japanese, generic-looking) atop Mount Fuji at sunrise (see image below). Amaterasu is believed to be the source from which all light emanates in the primary Shinto creation myth. Aoshima’s beings, as embodiments of evanescence, continually change forms but are frozen, like stills from animated film.

“What makes Japan a particularly interesting place to study,” Inouye notes in the exhibition’s audio tour, "Continued on Page 6"
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“is how animism there managed to survive the suppression of both monotheism and rationalism.” Today, it asserts itself in many forms, both subtle and obvious. Many are showcased in Sacred Monsters. . . Because the logic of animism is inherently inclusive, the spirits are neither essentially good or bad, helpful or harmful. Rather, they are a constantly changing combination of both.”

The program of eight films selected by Napier (7 anime and one live-action) complements the paintings, digital prints, and sculptures in the exhibition, and a “lounge” has been designed inside the Tisch Gallery where the movies are available on demand on two flat screen monitors. Napier will teach a course this fall called “The World of Japanese Animation: Culture, Cult, and Commerce,” directly related to the exhibition. “This fall my students will enhance their knowledge of Japanese culture through [this] innovative . . . exhibition that will also appeal to audiences outside the University.” Napier remarked “it is wonderful to have this aesthetic oasis right in the heart of the Medford campus . . . . The Tufts University Art Gallery is a vital resource, not only for Tufts faculty and students but for the community as well.”

Napier theorizes anime as having three essential modes: apocalypse, festival, and the elegiac, all of which are represented in her selections. The apocalyptic mode is at work in two futurist dramas, Akira and Ghost in the Shell II: Innocence. Napier describes Katsuhiro Otomo’s Akira (1988) as a “bleak yet exhilarating cyberpunk extravaganza” set in “Neo Tokyo, 2019” where biker gangs, military units, rebels and telekinetic mutants contend for control of the ruined metropolis. Ghost in the Shell II: Innocence (2004) is a tour de force of cutting-edge animation that weaves a story that is part futuristic murder mystery and part fantasy about the existential relationships among humans, animals, cyborgs, and dolls. “Blending cyberpunk with Shintoesque animism,” says Napier, “director Oshii Mamoru creates a film that is disturbing, unique, and impossible to forget.”

Another angle on the porous boundary between the real and the virtual is depicted in Satoshi Kon’s Paprika (2006), a sci-fi drama in which a machine is invented to access people’s dreams for therapeutic purposes. The sexy, female scientist-protagonist directs her “dream alter ego” to help exercise a policeman-patient’s nightmares and in doing so, “we enter dream worlds that are sometimes frightening, sometime exhilarating, but always spectacular,” Napier admits. The worlds are ones in which inanimate objects like dolls and toys come alive and grow to monstrous proportions, not unlike Mr.’s monumental doll head/doll house sculpture called Strawberry Voice.

Mr. (b. 1969) created this anime-inspired disembodied doll head with just one eye open, an aperture through which viewers encounter a miniature dollhouse inside its hollowed out head. The sculpture’s ambiguous interior/exterior boundary is underscored by its unsettling juxtaposition of a monumental head as container of tiny doll-house parts, which turns a surrogate girl into an object of play.

Beautiful Dreamer (1984), the earliest of the anime presented, centers around preparations for an annual school festival (matsuri) that shifts to the achievement of a perfect adolescent fantasy world. Similar to western carnival, or “world-turned-upside-down,” the Japanese matsuri allows for the community to celebrate a new year.

It is so exciting to have this most meaningful project realized, the result of a true collaboration among many. Alex’s Place has already become a meeting point for students, faculty, staff on campus, and a center of lively activities, quiet contemplation, and making connections between people. That really reflects my image of Alex. I remember vividly meeting him his very first semester on campus, and being impressed how involved he already was on campus as a Senator and knew so many people and engaged in all that was around him. It is so fitting that Alex’s Place will continue this spirit.

Tom and Andrea Mendell were instrumental at key stages in the process and always helped us to think bigger and more creatively about the outcome. They had a true vision for this project, and we wouldn’t have the quality design we do today were it not for their involvement.

The place where we are standing is result of a national design competition where talented artists and designers around country vied to be selected. Ricardo Barreto, Director of Urban Arts Institute at Mass. College of Art and Design and Christina Lanzl, its Project Manager – managed that process. The creative team who designed Alex’s Place and won the design competition are nationally known public artist Jackie Ferrara and landscape architect M. Paul Friedberg. Having their talent and reputation associated with Alex’s Place will ensure that not only will it continue to be appreciated by the Tufts community, but it will be a destination place for people who admire their work and will come to Tufts specifically to see the results of their collaboration.

The design process involved student, staff, faculty and the community, all of whom offered their insights and dreams for use of the rooftop. Opportunities for feedback were many: a model was on view in the library, public lectures were given by Amy Schlegel and others, and an exhibition of Jackie and Paul’s work at the Tufts University Art Gallery, and a display of the model at Community Day attended by hundreds of Somerville and Medford residents.

Thank you to:
- Tim Brooks, Director of Alumni Relations
- Ralph Dineen Architects
- Jackie Ferrara, public artist
- M. Paul Friedberg, landscape architect
- Patricia Fuller, Curator of Public Art at List Visual Art Center at MIT (member of jury)
- Eric Johnson, Executive Director of Development
- Jeff Katzin At6
- Tom and Andrea Mendell
- Monica McGhie, Professor of Contemporary Art
- Jo-Ann Michalak, Director of Tisch Library
- Bruce Reitman, Dean of Students
- John Roberto, Vice President for Operations
- Amy Schlegel, Director of Galleries and Collections
- Paul Tucker, Professor of Art History at U-Mass Boston and head of their public art program, Arts on the Point (member of jury)
- Your Space Landscaping

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Alex’s Place—The New Tisch Library Rooftop

Excerpts from the Tufts University Press Release by Alexander Reid

Tufts University has transformed the underused rooftop above the Tisch Library into a new space that is one of the very few recent examples of public art in the Boston metropolitan area. “Alex’s Place” represents a collaborative vision, a stylized blending of modern landscape design and fine art by New York-based artist Jackie Ferrara and landscape architect M. Paul Friedberg. “Given the scarcity of new public art in the Boston area, this is a magnificent contribution not only to Tufts, but to the artistic landscape of the region,” says Ricardo Barreto, director of the UrbanArts Institute at the Massachusetts College of Art.

From the outset, the objective was to capitalize on the plaza’s existing attributes – its central location near the campus green and its sweeping views of downtown Boston – while also adding aesthetic and functional amenities to create a usable and inviting space for multiple purposes, all of them tied to the rhythm and pace of campus life.

Friedberg is an internationally renowned landscape architect known for his extensive work with city parks, municipal and corporate plazas and main street malls. Ferrara is known for creating art that engages viewers intellectually and heightens their awareness of their physical relationship to the structures and spaces that she creates. To accomplish their goals, the team crafted a design that accommodates sitting, studying, and socializing as well as performances and exhibitions on the 11,000 square-foot L-shaped Tisch Library rooftop plaza. The result features a sequence of distinct, interconnected spaces or “rooms.” Anchoring the plaza is a brick mosaic piazza upon which students or faculty can gather for exhibits and special events. Overhead, the spacing of the trellis’ slats creates patterned sunlight that moves according to the path of the sun. It creates the experience of moving through the space that is a central theme to Ferrara’s work. Standing nearby is a stylized sundial made with slate and glass tiles and also a steel stylus.

Further inside the plaza are secluded, meditative spaces that are equipped with seating for smaller groups and flanked by flower beds under a canopy of river birch trees. A third component features a small amphitheater for concerts, classes and poetry readings. Its surface has been inlaid with an oversized chessboard. The entire plaza is handicapped accessible.

“Alex’s Place” is a gift from Andrea and Tom Mendell in memory of their son Alex, a Tufts sophomore who died in 2003. Discussions about the $1.7 million project began in 2006. Ferrara was selected from a field of 150 artists and she chose to work on this project in collaboration with Friedberg.

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a period of controlled chaos, in which normal life is suspended. As Napier describes, the film “chronicles an endless day in which teenage characters of the [manga] long-running anime] series [by Takahashi Rumiko, Japan’s most popular manga artist] encounter entities from Japanese folklore and mythology who transform their normal world into the stuff that dreams are made of.”

Mahomi Kunikata’s (b. 1979) stymied narrative paintings also appear grounded in Japan’s traditional culture of matsuri. Her manga-esque drawing style and big-eyed characters are pastiches of contemporary and traditional social references. In Kunikata’s painting No Cherry Blossom Viewers in Sight, the festival appears to be winding down, as lanterns catch fire, “sausages” hang from tree limbs and little ghosts hover about, while the ground is strewn with stuffed animals, dolls and other toys, like the aftermath of the doll’s parade in Paprika.

In contrast to this resurrection of a lost past that Inouye points to, Napier sees the festival as having elegiac qualities as a nostalgic lamentation of what has been lost. The elegiac is a prominent genre of anime represented in the exhibition by the earliest of the three works by revered director Hayao Miyazaki, My Neighbor Totoro (1989). Two young sisters, who have recently moved to the rural outskirts of Tokyo in the 1950s, befriended a massive forest spirit known as Totoro living in their midst. Totoro might be a kami, or it might be a liminal being, part animal, part spirit, that is simultaneously “creepy” and “cute.” Totoro’s fierce, reverberating growl might be interpreted either as an expression of joy or of his awesome power. “Weaving natural enchantment . . . together with the animistic supernatural . . . Miyazaki presents us with a portrait of the unfocused magic of childhood” that has made it a classic for kids and adults alike, notes Napier.

The fashion design duo TOKYO KAMEN (Tokyo Mask) have created a troupe of five life-size “monster dolls” representing a “creepy-cute” fusion. Perhaps they are an invented kind of kami that pay homage to both Miyazaki’s imaginary creature and Totoro’s western counterpart of Maurice Sendak’s creatures from Where the Wild Things Are. TOKYO KAMEN’s sculptures have an uncannily anthropomorphic presence that belies the obvious fact that they are inflatable “dolls” made of brightly colored fake fur and decorative materials (see image on p. 1).

An urban counterpart to Miyazaki’s elegiac, animist world might be found in Oscar Oiwa’s paintings, titled Stock Shop, Mountain, and Tunnel. Oiwa (b. 1965, São Paulo, Brazil) composes strangely unpopulated cityscapes that are nevertheless animated by mysterious, unseen forces. Tunnels and passageways beckon us to foreboding realms we can only imagine behind and beyond the accretions of the built environment, one that is either in ruins or under construction, which is to say, in a state of transformation.

Other menacing signs such as smoke, fire, and precariously perched, dilapidated buildings appear in Oiwa’s paintings that suggest an apocalyptic sensibility and an ambience of dread. This sensibility links Oiwa both to what Napier identifies as apocalyptic anime and to that of Ju-On (The Grudge), an unconventional live-action horror film in

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which the shadow of the past is embodied as a vengeful female spirit whose face is obscured by a veil of black hair. *The Grudge* insinuates a sense of horror not through spectacular, otherworldly means but through its prosaic urban location, eerie atmosphere, and everyday situations in which something horrible happens, making it “a welcome contrast to the typical Hollywood bloodbath,” asserts Napier.

The central trope of Miyazaki’s 2000 medieval epic *Princess Mononoke*, the highest grossing Japanese movie of all time and considered by many to be his masterpiece, is the lost, primeval forest. Among the forest gods in this primeval fantasy realm are kami such as tree spirits (tiny ghosts with chattering, wobbly skulls), the elusive deer spirit (shishigami — the monumental stag horns sprouting upwards like tangled branches), its alter ego phantom-of-the-night (the detarako), and other supernatural figures hostile to the human world. The most notable of these liminal figures is San, the young female protagonist raised by she-wolves who...

The figurative sculptures of clay artist Kenjiro Kitade (b. 1977, Tokyo) also have this uncanny yet alien sensibility straddling past and future in a parallel universe. Kitade’s white and red earthenware “sheep-children” have stout, chubby human bodies that are grotesquely mismatched with masked, horned heads. His figures gesture playfully, innocently, and with genuine curiosity towards the world around them, yet this is a toxic world where childhood experience is filtered through oppressive gas masks and contaminated by adult irresponsibility. The artist’s pessimistic world-view is embodied in these hybrid creatures that symbolize a premature, foreboding intelligence of environmental disaster that feels simultaneously futuristic and nostalgic.

Supporter Profile — Orna Shulman

Orna Shulman, Circle Supporter, Tufts Alumna (’78), and host of The Circle’s October event in New York socialism, communism and workers’ unions — one can see that this period was full of seismic change for the individual and his social contract, not to mention the influence of the new theories of psychotherapy. Of course, all of this occurred against the background of the First World War which, in my opinion, was the definitive event for transforming European society and setting the course not only for new political realities, but for art itself.

While I was introduced to art history through Janson’s well-known book in a survey of art history course (and the only art history course I ever took), it was really my time spent in the Fogg Museum at Harvard which secured my interest in German Expressionism and the other Modernist movements of the early twentieth century, such as Cubism, all of which reflected a continuing search for a new language and a total break from the historical past of figurative painting. Some of these artists impressed me as being even more revolutionary and avant-garde for their time than contemporary artists today.

Learning just began at Tufts; it’s a lifelong process. There was not a particular course that secured my interest in art. I am a very intellectually curious person and I am autodidactic, one who reads a lot on subjects that interest me, whether it’s Albert Gleizes’ treatise on the Golden Triangle from 1916 or Marinetti’s 11-point Manifesto on Futurism written in 1909, which heralded the age of speed and “glorified war, militarism and the scorn for women.”

Art, in my opinion, reflects the search for a utopian vision or the reflection of truth. That continues today, but, unfortunately, what with the democratic commercial forces affecting the production of art, the profound is harder to find. But it can be found.

On Collecting

Since my first paycheck when I was a summer associate in law school, I have been an emerging serious collector, not only of art, but decorative objects from the early-twentieth century. That first paycheck went to buy a wonderful American waterfall Art Deco bedroom set, and I did not even have an apartment to put it in! It was American because that was what I could afford. And that is one of the lessons in collecting: Buy the best that you can afford and be disciplined. During my thirties, my home in Washington and then my apartment in New York had the feel of an early Middle Europa salon from the early-twentieth century. They were beautiful, with an evocative gravitas.

Brian Kneip: Exempla, continued

faces and skeletal legs, are caricatures of the endlessly cycling everyman. Visually, the creatures are presented as shadows, illuminated only by the lights that are cast upon them. They cover all available surfaces, reacting to our intrusions into their small worlds.

Q&A with Amy Ingrid Schlegel:

Why did you decide to use a child’s drawing as the inspiration for the creatures you call “bubs” in this series?

A few years ago I saved some amazing drawings from a friend’s recycling bin. Created by a young friend of his then 3-year old, they were raw, innocent and incredibly expressive. These big-headed creatures seemed awkward and unhappy yet determined, their mouths frozen in resolute grins. They looked like they were striving for something, success of some sort perhaps, or, more generally, happiness, and I couldn’t help but think of the rituals we perform in the hope of bringing similar success or happiness.

Can you describe how you conceive the systems in which the creatures are trapped by the abstract tasks they repeatedly perform, such as Emerge, Erect, and Expand?

I start with an action verb that indicates progress, a move from one state to another, hopefully better, state. I then sketch until I find an idea that feels right, one where the creatures seem purposeful yet unhappy. Their behavior might seem directed toward...
You said body “than Louis Vuitton shop placed within the exhibition. The description of his workshops and his approach to his art and the exhibition was eye-opening and I became more appreciative of both his process as an artist and his skill as a businessman.

Thornton ends the book with the chapter on the Venice Biennial. Throughout the chapter the text alternates between describing the show and the parties around the city and her end-of-day lap swim in an outdoor pool at the Cipriani. The swim clearly relaxes and refreshes her after a long, hot day. For me, that swim captured much of what I find difficult and disappointing about contemporary art. On a good day, I get refreshed looking at art; a painting by Rothko, Richter, or Still can transport me to a point of almost meditative calm. Alas, that does not seem to be on the agenda of the artists Thornton profiles. Like Marcia Tucker, they implore us to work at understanding. But sometimes I, along with many of our museum visitors, are looking for a different experience.

You have described these characters as "shadows" that only become visible when light is cast on them; could you explain this idea of a shadow activated by the visitor, who becomes the catalyst? do you want viewers to think these creatures are their own shadows?

The creatures are everywhere, toiling along every available surface, there to be seen if we have the right light to shine. The light is a source of illumination, not just physical but intellectual, allowing us to see hints of our own behavior. In Plato’s allegory of the cave, people mistake shadows for reality and it is only the free person who can see the true forms. Likewise, these creatures act in accordance with their limited view. Only we, having the benefit of perspective, can appreciate the futility of their behavior.

You have said that this body of work is “more about futility than emergence”; can you explain why your work is not about patterns of “emergent behavior”? What, then, does “futility” mean to you, philosophically?

Emergence is an important aspect of these pieces since it is such a good way to model complex interactions. In the same way that the flocking behavior of birds is the result of many interactions between individual birds, human societies are the results of many interactions between individual humans. In these works, each creature tries to achieve its goal (getting in or out of a box, getting to the top of a mound, etc.) while avoiding nearby creatures. The resulting group behavior is the combination of all of these individual behaviors.

So emergence is a good way to get at what I’m both exploring and mocking: the often futile nature of our striving. Mankind hasn’t changed much in the last four thousand years, at least not in terms of our behavior and existential struggles, yet we place so much emphasis on progress, in particular scientific materialism. Even our spiritual explorations are marked with deep yearning and judgment, as if those who pray or meditate longer are somehow further along a metaphysical journey. Like the creatures in these pieces, we mindlessly cycle from one thing to the next, never resting, never being able to see beyond our constraints.

Still, I see these pieces as optimistic. Identifying with and laughing at the creatures’ behaviors allows me to accept and laugh at my own, similar, behaviors, which can lead to change and a more mindful experience of life.

In this day and age, when leadership qualities, skills, and experience are encouraged at the pre-school level, institutionalized in university curricula, and utilized by employers in job performance reviews, do you believe leaders are “born and not made,” or that they are necessary at all to the proper functioning of a society?

No idea!
The Iconography of Animism and Anime, continued

as Napier notes, “seems to spring from the myths of early Shinto . . . not [due to] any moral attributes . . . but because of [her] literally awesome powers.”
The forest and all its inhabitants are threatened with destruction by the evil-yet-human female feudal mistress Eboshi who rules an iron manufacturing walled community. Ultimately, Napier thinks that *Princess Mononoke* presents an alternative vision privileging the irrational, the supernatural, and the apocalyptic that has lingered on the boundaries of 20th century Japanese culture.

The incredible success of *Princess Mononoke* and Miyazaki’s indelible, imaginary deer-spirit has undoubtedly influenced many artists internationally. The folkloric “deer-man” spirit has been reimagined by painter Nobuhiro Ishihara (b. 1966, Kanagawa, Japan) as a wise but tormentend kami. Ishihara’s *Deer Man* series of paintings (2006-2008) may have been inspired in part by Miyazaki’s great spirit of the forest, the shishigami. Unlike Miyazaki’s deer-spirit Ishihara’s is a hybrid creature, who communicates directly with humans. A visit to the ancient Buddhist temple in Nara, Japan at night sparked Ishihara’s interest in investigating the legend of the deer-messenger. As Houza Hirata notes, “deer have been regarded as sacred messengers at certain Shinto shrines, such as Kasuga Taisha in Nara and Itukushima Shrine in Miyajima (Hiroshima). These specific locations have their own ‘legends’ related to deer.” Ishihara’s “reanimation” of this ancient kami might represent the forerunner of global warming, heralding the dangerous imbalance between humans and nature, or other ecological disaster, an interest similar to Kitade and Miyazaki.

Ishihara’s reinvention of an imaginary creature aligns him with painter Tomokazu Matsuyama (b. 1976, Tokyo, Japan). Matsuyama re-presents the mythical, chimerical creature common to East Asian cultures known in Japan as the kiri. Japanese art has depicted this most powerful yet peaceful of all hybrid beasts as having the attributes of a deer, a dragon, and a unicorn with a horse’s tail. Matsuyama’s stylized kiris written in frozen poses that are a burst of energy, color, and form. The creature’s bodies are comprised of a pastiche of textile-like painted patterns adapted from akiko-e prints, especially ones utilizing the gingham check pattern, which is both over 200 years old and very contemporary and western. Matsuyama bridges the gap between east and west, high art and street fashion, kimono and contemporary clothing, and Tokyo and New York, where he has lived for over a decade.

Last, but far from least, in our panoply of “sacred monsters” and “everyday animism” is Miyazaki’s 2001 *Spirited Away*, which won the Academy Award for Best Animated Film, and which perhaps best illustrates the exhibition’s theme. Set primarily in a “Bathhouse of the Gods,” a ten-year-old girl named Sen seeks a job there from the witch-proprietor (think of a spa-resort where the clientele are all gods, demons, and ghosts, and the staff are all humans or animals). The narrative thrust of this coming of age tale is set into motion when the girl and her parents are lured by a supernatural force into an otherworldly realm and then are parted when the parents magically turn into pigs after gorging themselves on the banquet prepared for the kami and yokai.

Miyazaki’s newest anime *Ponyo on the Cliff by the Sea* (2008) will be screened on campus, in conjunction with the Tufts Film Series, on the last weekend of the exhibition. The film’s plot centers on a fish girl who runs away from her home in the sea. She ends up stranded on the shore and is rescued by Sósuke, a five-year old boy.

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Beautiful Obsessions, continued

Mary O’Malley (see website: maryomalleyart.com) is a Massachusetts artist whose work did not appear in Miami but was represented in the Tufts University Art Gallery’s Annual Juried Summer Exhibition in 2007. The show is open to all professional artists living and/or with a studio in three of Tufts’ host communities (Grafton, Medford, and Somerville)

While O’Malley shares a sense of complexity and an appreciation for organic composition with Jill Gallenstein, her images derive as much from historical decorative art as they do from the depths of the imagination. One can see hints of ornate Victorian lace along with the bold patterns of African fabrics. There are also influences from Middle Eastern arabesques to the flattened vegetation common in Far Eastern graphic art. She adds drama to her works on paper by beginning with a black ground and drawing upon it with silver and gold inks. The effect brings to mind a dew-soaked spider web shimmering in morning sunlight.

What is the motivation for obsessive art and why are we attracted to it? Sebastian Smee, the chief art critic for The Boston Globe, suggests the driving force may come from “harrow vacu, or fear of empty space.” In artists “… it can come over as an anxious attempt to keep uncertainty at bay.” This may be true for some who work in this genre, but good art must do more than simply fill ‘the void’.

Process is as important to most obsessive artists as the end product of their labors. There is no great mystery to their methods. They leave a diary of their thoughts and actions on the surface. Their mark-making is self-referential and individual; a unique record of personal experience. What you see is what you get.

So what makes good obsessive art and not just glorified doodling? If the above artists are any indication, process is the key. Self-imposed rules and boundaries keep the artists from falling in with myriad “wall-paper” designers who churn out forgettable patterns. Gallenstein and O’Malley are skilled in their use of negative space. They leave large expanses of surface area untouched. The effect heightens contrast and raises new questions about the relative value of intricate all-over pattern versus minimalistic open fields.

Moriyama downplays beauty for psychological effect. His clustered habitats decry dystopian trends and simultaneously shrink mankind down to a humble microbial level. Yet, he renders his dark vision subtly with a style that is childishly primitive, humorous and playful.

On a gut level obsessive art can be appreciated for imagination, craftsmanship and dedication. But, to get beyond producing a mere aesthetically pleasing experience, each artist who delves into this field must find a way – philosophical, art-historical or formal – to imbue their work with relevance and meaning.

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Mary O’Malley, *Bird Bouquet #1*, 2007, ink on paper 32 x 24", courtesy of the artist