

# Tasmanisme

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Japanese aesthetics have influenced me since childhood. My father's parents met during the American occupation of Japan at the end of WWII. At the time my grandmother was a Japanese English translator that swooned my young military grandfather into a relationship filled with love, devotion, and a sense of family he never had. My grandfather developed great admiration for Japanese culture spending 8 years living and working in Japan. It was my grandmother's infatuation with the west that brought them to the United States where they had my father. Although my grandmother didn't raise my father bilingual due to underlying racial tension, they upheld many Japanese cultural traditions in his upbringing that were then passed down to my brother and I. Some of my favorite childhood stories include the heroic journeys of Momotaro the peach boy and Kintaro the child of superhuman strength.

During my undergraduate studies in the arts I developed an even deeper interest in Japanese aesthetics, especially the influence of Zen philosophy. The sense of ephemerality, seasonal color schemes, asymmetrical compositions, and use of negative space in Zen art intrigued and perplexed me. The Zen art and philosophies stood in stark contrast to the western techniques and theories on which my university courses were heavily focused. While studying, I discovered authors such as D.T. Suzuki, Alan Watts, and Edwin O. Reischauer, who all were instrumental to introducing Japanese culture, especially Zen philosophy, to the west. Around the same time, I began appreciating Japanese film, particularly the works of Akira Kurosawa and Yasujiro Ozu. I became intrigued by their unique approaches to cinematography and story telling. As my interests in Japanese culture expanded, a fortuitous opportunity arose for me to move to Japan, resulting in my living in Yokohama for a year (2014), teaching English to Japanese K-12 students. With my free time I studied traditional Japanese art techniques, particularly the unique monochrome and polychrome approach to Nihonga(日本画), minimalist aleatory compositions in sumi-e(墨絵) and varying styles of emotion emitted by Shodou(書道). Although work was demanding, my time in Yokohama was a life-changing and inspirational experience that encouraged me to continue pursuing an interest in Japanese aesthetics and language study. I often reflect on my time in Japan and how my small apartment quickly transformed into a productive art studio where I acquired a collection of over 2 dozen oil paintings and drawings inspired by the people I met and places I explored.

To this day I continue to experiment with an east meets west stylistic fusion, particularly in my approach to plein air painting. I strive to adopt Zen-inspired aesthetic qualities, such as *yuugen*: “mysterious sense of beauty”; *johakuyu*: “beginning, break, rapid”; and *shibui* “simple, subtle beauty”, into my repertoire, expressed through brush stroke and compositional design. I also pay close attention to the role of negative space in my work, and how it affects the wholeness of a composition. Often this negative space represents an entity that is just as important as the main subject matter. In the visual representation of Japanese aesthetics, particularly in Zen art, there is a strong sense of negative space. I am attracted to this principle much like the French Impressionist painters were fascinated with Japonism in the 19th century. Ukiyo-e’s (wood block print) use of asymmetrical compositions, bold colors, and unique perspective and foreshortening offered an exotic alternative approach to visual art that challenged traditional Western academic methodologies. Ukiyo-e aside, as a westerner I believe there is still a great deal of room for exploration in Japan’s traditional painting techniques when applied to the western aesthetic cannon, here I seek to achieve a stylistic convergence and a deeper sense of oneness.