

Janet Olney

Japan: A Journey of Gesture in Two Parts

If awarded Henry Walters Travelling Fellowship Grant, I would use the opportunity to study the ancient practice and art of calligraphy in relation to Japanese culture and the practice of Buddhism in Japan. I would divide this six-week *Journey of Gesture* into two parts: research and transcription.

The first part of the journey would focus on research with a month in Tokyo studying basic calligraphy with Master of Japanese Calligraphy, Yamamoto Kouga. Her classes are small and include an English-speaking interpreter, which would accelerate my ability to both learn and to acclimate to the culture. Taught in the traditional way, the students copy her example until it can be mastered while deepening their understanding of the meditative aspect of calligraphy. My time in Tokyo would also include research into traditional and contemporary Japanese art and culture through the visits to museums, galleries and temples. Furthermore, the National University in Tokyo has strong program in calligraphy and fine art. The school would be a resource for locating and connecting with other master calligraphers in Tokyo as I become more comfortable with the city and Japanese culture.

The second part of the journey, would involve two weeks of travel around Japan to continue to research and understand how calligraphy and Buddhism are intricately woven into Japanese culture, from the north central city of Nikko to the southern island of Miyajima. I would transcribe my journey around the country with traditional ink and brush in a series of travel journals made of Mulberry paper. I would integrate my new, albeit limited, understanding of calligraphy with my own drawing sensibilities to capture the essence of the experience of place and people. From Toshogu, the lavishly decorated shrine in Nikko, to Miyajima, know as the “shrine island”, with it’s famous Torii gate, I would use my drawings to interact with people I meet along the way and have them add their own marks to my travel documentary. This, in turn, would allow me to continue to improve my calligraphic ability in the apprentice style of copying the marks of others.

Why is studying the practice and history of calligraphy in Japan important to my work? All of my paintings begin with a series of gestural ink drawings on paper. I use a Japanese brush and Sumi ink to focus on the fluidity of the marks sweeping across the paper, the use of the arm and wrist and the internal journey the gesture inspires. It is meditative and intuitive. The linear forms I create are

continuous line, both free form and calligraphic. I arrived at the this process to tap into inner knowledge by letting go of thought and letting the body speak through action.

This active practice in ink has focused my interest on the art of calligraphy, specifically Japanese calligraphy because of its philosophical and spiritual roots in Zen Buddhism. In the United States we think of calligraphy as decorative lettering but the Japanese word for calligraphy, "Shodo," has more nuanced meaning. It is considered an art within art, a way of life and a sacred knowledge learned through watching the master and copying the model¹. Described as "...alive yet immortal, real yet untouchable, profound yet complex, laconic yet abyssal,"¹ the idea of duality, especially in terms of the surface, time and space, is a prominent theme in my work. To merge my current gestural process with the discipline and practice of calligraphy would have a profound affect on my work.

Why is it important for me to travel to learn calligraphy? Immersion in the culture is a critical component to the understanding and perception of how calligraphy relates to modern Japanese life and why as an ancient tradition it is still carried forth today. In Japanese philosophy, calligraphy is not just about mark making or art, but is a reflection of human experience. For this reason, my proposal includes a budget for renting an apartment in Tokyo for a month. This would allow me to stay in a neighborhood and experience Japanese life on a more intimate level and to begin to understand the philosophy of calligraphy from an interior perspective rather than as a tourist.

I realize that the difference in language and culture will make my project and journey challenging. For this reason, I intentionally chose to start my journey with a class that includes an English-speaking interpreter and have secured, David Myer (Mt. Royal '14) as a contact to help navigate the intricacies of the Japanese culture while in Tokyo. (After graduation, David will be returning to his family in Japan to resume his work). This *Journey of Gesture* project would inspire incredible artistic and personal growth for me and, upon my return, I would seek additional opportunities to share my experiences.

¹ "Beyond Calligraphy, Traditional and Modern Japanese and Chinese Art." *Beyond Calligraphy, Traditional and Modern Japanese and Chinese Art*. N.p., n.d. Web. 02 Apr. 2014.

² Ibid.

Journey Part I -Tokyo:

Museums:

Tokyo Museum of Contemporary Art
Hara Museum of Contemporary Art
Mori Art Museum
Watari Museum of Contemporary Art
Amuse Museum (textiles)
Nezu Museum (pre-modern art and calligraphy)
Ukiyo-e Ote Memorial Museum of Art (wood-block prints)
Japanese Sword Museum
Taimeiken Kite Museum

Galleries:

Taka Ishii Gallery
SCAI Bathhouse
Wako Works of Art
Mizuma Art Gallery
Arantaniurano
Take Ninagawa
Misake and Rosen

Temples:

Sensoji Temple (Tokyo's oldest Buddhist Temple)
Meiji Shrine
Kanda Myojin Shrine
Gokokuji Temple
Togo Shrine
Tennoji Temple

Day Trips from Tokyo:

Mt. Fuji
Rinno-ji Temple

Reference Guides:

Art Space Tokyo by Ashley Rawlings and Craig Mod. Guide to art spaces in neighborhoods that are off the beaten path and guide to the Tokyo art world.

Tokyo Handy Guide, published in English by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government. Maps and listings by neighborhood.

Lonely Planet online: lonelyplanet.com/japan/tokyo

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14 day Travel Itinerary: A journey in Gesture Part II

Each day will include time create ink drawings documenting places, experiences and people I meet on my journey and practicing my calligraphy skills.

Day 1 - Tokyo to Kamakura: The Great Buddha, Kenchoji Temple, Zuisenji Temple and gardens.

Day 2 - Kamakura to Nikko: Toshogu Temple, Nikko National Park, Tamozawa Villa.

Day 3 - Nikko to Okunikko (national park): Mountainous region of Nikko, hiking, waterfalls.

Day 4 - Nikko to Takayama: Hida Folk Village Museum, Hiigahiyama Walk, Matsuri no Mori (museum)

Day 5 - Takayama to Kanazawa: Kenrokuen Gardens, 21st Century Museum (art)

Day 6 - Kanazawa to Kyoto: Nijo Castle, Kyoto Imperial Place,

Day 7 - Eastern Kyoto Day 2: Ryoanji Temple (famous rock garden), Kinakuji (golden temple)

Day 8 - Kyoto Day 3: with side trip to Nara.

Day 9 - Kyoto to Mt. Koya (Center of Shigon Buddhism): Garan temple complex, overnight temple lodging

Day 10 - Mt. Koya to Osaka: National art museum, Museum of History, Shitennoji Temple (one of the oldest temples), Aquarium.

Day 11 - Osaka to Hiroshima: Hiroshima Peace park, Hiroshima castle, Shukkeien Garden

Day 12 - Miyajima: "Shrine Island" Torii Gate, Mt. Misen, Daisho-in Temple

Day 13 - Return to Tokyo

Day 14 - Fly back to the US

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Henry Walters Travelling Fellowship Grant Travel Budget

Detailed and Itemized budget for \$10,000 travel grant:

Expense	Description	Amount
Journey 1: Education	Travel to Japan for Study in Tokyo.	
Airfare	(Roundtrip) Baltimore-Tokyo and baggage	\$1,400
Local transportation	Subway, bus and taxi around Tokyo	\$300
Accommodations	Apartment rental \$140/night for 30 days (includes tax and fees)	\$4,200
Meals	Food while in the apartment	\$800
Educational Expense	"Basic Beginners Class" at the Calligraphy Art class in Roppongi. 1 month/ 12,000 yen	\$120
Supplies	Calligraphy supplies	\$150
Research	Tokyo Gakugei University, art department.	\$0
Travel Insurance	In case of unforeseen circumstances that prevent my travel.	\$150
Incidentals	Unexpected expenses	\$100
Admission tickets	Museums, gardens	\$250
	Total: 7470.00	
Journey 2: Transcription	Travel around Japan to important sites of art and religion.	
Rail Pass	14 day Japan Rail Pass	\$438
Accommodations	Accommodations while travelling: YHI Hostels/Minshuku (Family B &B's)	\$800
Meals	Meals while traveling \$70/day	\$980
Local Transportation	Bus tickets	\$150
Tickets	Museums, gardens	\$150
	Total: \$2518	
Total:		\$9988.00