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ART 200 01

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*Tearoom*

Stationed at the Museum of Fine Arts Boston is *Tearoom* by Saeki Shunkô. This piece from 1936 has the subject matter of two young women placed in an area that is reminiscent of a hotel or restaurant space near plants and decor. There are distinct qualities of Japanese and Western aesthetics and Saeki Shunkô blends them together. There is the constant tradition of Japanese painting displayed in this piece using ink, color and silver. This clean cut piece, on a panel, has a composition that builds up from the figures to the background, the depth of the composition, and shows a sense of symmetry through asymmetrical balance.

The two young ladies are stationed in the bottom left of the composition. They seem to be waitresses in a nice hotel or restaurant. Their forms were created from thin lines entirely. They are distinct within the composition because of the yellow skirts of their dresses. Along with that they are dressed in Western style garments. Plus, the hairstyles they have are Western as well. The crimped and curled ends of their hair show the aesthetic and fashion of the late 1930s. The two women are individualized by their stance and some facial features. They also have natural bodies with idealized faces that are seen in traditional Japanese artworks. The woman on the left has softer eyebrows, crimped hair pulled back by a yellow headband with a bow, and arms hidden behind her back with hands clasped or near each other holding a serving platter. Her heels are almost together but are naturally placed. She also seems to be looking past the viewer compared to her companion on the right. Then, the woman on the right has curled bangs and

ends, her arms placed by her side showing a serving platter in her left hand, and her left foot placed behind her right. She also has darker red lips, blush, and eyebrows compared to her companion. Plus, this woman has an air of confidence as she stares at the viewer with a relaxed posture. These two ladies have minute differences like the creases of their uniforms against their bodies showing a form of realism. They are placed naturally in a scene of everyday life. It's like someone took a snapshot of two working women in 1936. The distinctive features are the Western style clothing and individualism of the two ladies. These two women are the focal points leading to the background.

The background space blends together nicely with toned and cool colors. There is no outrageous or obvious sense of value. Everything was created with thin lines. The background is almost like a supporting character to the two working ladies. There are distinct elements to the background. For example, there are different foliages that contrast with each other. Each plant also has different vases that blend together within the composition while being unique on their own. There is a cactus who stands out against its long leafed companions. The rest of the plants show their distinctive value scales and textures. For example, there are some plants with light stems and darker leaves. Another example, there are some plants with rough lines along the foliage and vice versa. They are on a unique shelf made up of thin, straight lines that come out in jutting points on their ends. There is empty space between each plant. There is a naturalness in how the plants are placed. There is also a pattern in their placement. There are two plants in two rows and one plant in its own row. There is no sense of hollowness because it is bordered by a Western style column, a rectangular planter of four plants, the two ladies, and the post or counter on the left. The plants on the shelf, planter, and column are contrasted by the almost empty left side of the composition. The post/counter and foliage with white flowers at the top left corner

take some space on the left side of the composition. The post/counter has a minimal design of red repeating trees. Behind the shelf there is a bamboo-like chair with redish pink and blue stripes with a brown checkered pattern on its cushion. A viewer may not see the chair and the continuation of the floor at first glance and it shows the depth of this composition despite its flatness.

A viewer may not notice how the blue and white checkered floor continues behind the planter, shelf , and around the bamboo-like chair at first glance. This piece has the distinct flatness and the subtle depth of a Japanese painting. For instance, the perspective of this composition is intuitive yet accurate. The planter has a corner of space between the column that borders it. The planter has a smaller corner of space between the post/counter. There is also a sense of three dimensionality when it comes to the planter, the post/counter, and chair. For instance, a viewer can imagine placing objects on the planter and post/counter and a person sitting in the chair behind the shelf. The post/counter, behind the two ladies, have implied depth despite the lack of shadows from either object or figures. It is implied that the floor continues beyond each side of the composition. The column on the left continues up and shows depth between the yellow architectural elements. The depth and placement of objects show how full this composition is through asymmetrical balance.

This composition can be sliced into two parts. One part is the empty space with the post/counter and the green foliage and the two ladies with the post/counter. The two ladies and post/counter could be its own separate part as well. The other part is the shelf planter and the further background space with the chair. The left side of the composition has the most empty space compared to the other side. There is not much going on except for simple, minute details of the ladies, the foliage, and post/counter. There is no natural clutter. The right side on the other

hand, has so much foliage, a column, and an extension of the background with the chair. This asymmetrical balance showcases a natural setting of a restaurant or hotel. Nothing totally outrageous is happening nor ostentatious. This is just a simple composition with strategically placed elements.

*Tearoom* is a simple piece created with elements who contrast with each other and come together within the composition. It is a piece depicting a scene from a normal day. Saeki Shunko has masterfully used ink, color, and silver to depict a Westernized setting with distinct Japanese qualities. The thin lines and cleanliness of the composition shows the Japanese tradition that has lasted for centuries. The buildup of the composition, use of depth, and asymmetrical balance has blended together to create a wonderful piece.

Citation



Saeki, Shunkô. *Tearoom*. 1936. Museum of Fine Arts

Boston,<https://collections.mfa.org/objects/510616/tearoom?ctx=412a8950-1a42-49d6-bd29-4bdf4fdceb9&idx=20>. Accessed 16 October 2021.