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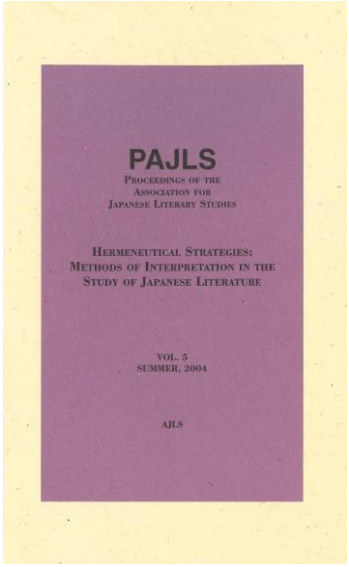

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THE HISTORICAL HORIZON OF TRUE ART: KAFŪ AND OKAKURA AT THE 1904 ST. LOUIS WORLD'S FAIR

Miya Mizuta Lippit

> Horizon there is none: only distance soaring into space—infinite concavity hollowing before you, and hugely arching above you—the color deepening with the height. But far in the midway-blue there hangs a faint, faint vision of palace towers, with high roofs horned and curved like moons—some shadowing of splendor strange and old, illumined by a sunshine soft as memory.
> Lafcadio Hearn, "Hōrai" (1904)

Japan's exhibition at the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904 was "by far the most unique exhibit of any foreign country,"[1] according to *The Official History of the Fair, St. Louis, 1904*, which also claimed: "Their ideas of art are radically different from those of any other nationality."[2] Nagai Kafū's "Inebriated Beauty" (Suibijin; 1904), later included in his well-known collection *American Stories* (Amerika monogatari; 1908), is set at the 1904 fair and purports to delineate the true story behind one of the paintings exhibited by an American there. Significantly, St. Louis was the first fair in which the classification of "Art" was construed to include not only painting and statuary but applied and industrial art as well, which meant that Japanese metalwork, lacquerware, and textiles were recognized as fine or "true" art for the first time.

The St. Louis World's Fair also became the site of another text well-known in the art world, Okakura Kakuzō's "Modern Problems in Painting." Delivered as a lecture at the fair, Okakura's essay defends modern Japanese painting by arguing that realism should not be the only measure of what constitutes "true" art. This paper employs a comparative perspective on Kafū's and Okakura's texts because, in part, these texts—one literary and written in Japanese, the other critical and written in English—demand such an approach. Written by men famous in their respective spheres, they appear against the backdrop of the redefinition of "fine art" at the St. Louis World's Fair and challenge the divisions between literature and art, history and art, truth and art, and war and art at

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[1] John Wesley Hanson, *The Official History of the Fair, St. Louis, 1904* (St. Louis: 1904), p. 369.
[2] Ibid., p. 373.

the time of Japan's imperial expansion during the Russo-Japanese War (1904-5).[3]

In describing Japan's exhibitions, the author of the official history of the fair reports: "It was a *picture* of the *real* Japan" (my emphasis).[4] This conflation of the "picture" and the "real," or the picture *as* the real Japan—not just its representation—resonates with the fact that by the turn of the twentieth century the "real" Japan had, in effect, been dislocated by its artwork. Japan's promotion of itself as an artistic nation, beginning with its participation in the Paris World Exposition of 1867, was so successful, that the stereotypical image of Japan as the "Greece of the East" gradually overwhelmed the physical landscape.[5] Envisioned through its artwork, the fantasy of Japan in the West—Japan as an artistic representation—began to substitute for the real Japan, eventually displacing the geographic entity. As Okakura famously said, "It is only art that represents Japan to the world."[6]

Artistic Japan was also a feminized Japan, reinforced by its appearance as "Fair Japan," the name of the Japanese pavilion at St. Louis. Japan is even figured as female in the frontispiece of an official fair publication that depicts Japan with a woman's face—all the other countries are drawn as males—explaining that on the evolutionary scale Japan ranks third behind Americo-Europeans and Russians, but can be placed three levels above Chinese and seven above Ainu.[7] Issues such as

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[3] Significantly, while the notion of "fine art" was reevaluated at St. Louis and made more inclusive, in Japan, following the adoption of the Western ideology of "fine art" as *bijutsu* during the third decade of Meiji, the Bunten (Ministry of Education Exhibition) was established in Tokyo in 1907. This government-sponsored forum for exhibiting artworks independent of industry, marked the first formal separation of fine arts from the so-called industrial arts in Japan.

[4] Hanson, p. 397.

[5] In volume five of the ten-volume memorial publication *Louisiana and the Fair. An Exposition of the World, Its People and Their Achievements*, ed. J.W. Buel, the chapter on Japan is titled "The Japanese– The Greeks of the East." Buel writes, "They have been called the Yankees of the east because of their ingenuity and indomitable courage, but they also deserve the designation of Greeks of the east, for their militant prowess and their artistic instincts, which are not exceeded by any people of the world" (St. Louis: World's Progress Publishing Company, 1904), p. 1693.

[6] Cited in "The Revival of Art and Literature," in *Japanese Thought in the Meiji Era*, ed. Kōsaka Masaaki, trans. David Abosch (Tokyo: Pan-Pacific Press, 1958), p. 225.

[7] The image appears as the frontispiece to volume five of *Louisiana and the Fair. An Exposition of the World, Its People and Their Achievements.* It was brought to my attention by Carol Ann Christ's mention of it in her essay "'The Sole

these, Japan's commodification and cultivation of an artistic and feminine persona during the Meiji period, relate to a longer manuscript that I am currently working on, an interdisciplinary analysis (between literary studies and art history) of the figure of the *bijin* (美人), or the beauty, that explores the ideological forces such as the birth of *bigaku* (aesthetics・美学) and *bijutsu* (fine art・美術) behind cultural works that thematize the *bijin* and from which the genre of painting *bijinga* (paintings of beauties・美人画) eventually emerges.[8]

Kafū's "Inebriated Beauty," which thematizes women and art and includes the word "*bijin*" in its title, is a text that fits the theme of my project, but is not a work that I have addressed until now. Here, I read it in an attempt to reevaluate my general approach to literary texts in the context of an interdisciplinary framework. In analyzing this text, I engage it as an event in a social, political, and historical process, with specific attention to the historical horizon of the St. Louis World's Fair, alongside Okakura's "Modern Problems in Painting." The perspective of the centennial of the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair adds another framework from which to address these two works, as I raise questions about the construction of Japanese aesthetic space in the Meiji period.

ARTIFICIAL HORIZON:

In *Truth and Method* Hans-Georg Gadamer develops his notion of hermeneutic thinking: "In the sphere of historical understanding," he says, "we [...] like to speak of horizons, especially when referring to the claim of historical consciousness to see the past in terms of its own being, not in terms of our own contemporary criteria and prejudices, but within its own historical horizon. The task of historical understanding also involves acquiring the particular historical horizon, so that what we are seeking to understand can be seen its true dimensions."[9] I cite this passage from Gadamer because of his use of the term "horizon" (a term imported from phenomenology that also relates to the practice of art), which he uses to

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Guardians of the Art Inheritance of Asia': Japan and China at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair," *positions* 8.3 (winter 2000): 689. The image, titled "Types and Development of Man," is accompanied by an explanation that reads: "The photogravure herewith is from an excellent specially prepared drawing which very accurately illustrates, as nearly as the science of ethnology is able to do, the characteristic types of mankind arranged in a progressive order of development from primitive or prehistoric man to the highest example of modern civilization."

[8] The manuscript is based on my dissertation, *Figures of Beauty: Aesthetics and the Beautiful Woman in Meiji Japan* (Yale University, 2002).

[9] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), p. 270.

describe how the interpreter is situated in the world. Because Kafū's narrative revolves around painting, and painting is the topic of Okakura's text as well, to understand what Gadamer is advocating, I begin by exploring this notion of the "horizon" as a component of the perspectival system employed by painters ("artificial perspective" to be precise). A form of artistic perception, perspective is a formal apparatus for configuring space—of what is here (viewpoint), there (vanishing point), and over there (on the horizon)—and describes the world according to a rational, systematic process or a set of laws known as the rules of perspective. Perspective creates distance and objectifies things, but also abolishes distance by drawing it into the eye, making it dependent on a subjective "point of view."[10] Each component of the perspectival system always returns to the viewing subject, to a subjective point of view.

The distance point or the horizon, simply put by Alberti, is: "There where our view, in all respects, comes to an end."[11] According to Hubert Damisch, who recounts the history of perspective in *The Origin of Perspective*, the value of the horizon has been described by Husserl, for instance, as a limit, a site of convergence, of "permanence and intemporality."[12] An *apparent* intersection that gives the effect of distance, the horizon has been conceived of not as distance itself, but as a "horizon of ideality."[13] Damisch further clarifies that the horizon is part of "the formal apparatus put in place by the perspective paradigm," a system that "is equivalent to that of the sentence, in that it assigns a subject a place within a previously established network that gives it meaning...."[14] This conception of the horizon within the perspective system assigns the spectator (the viewer or the reader) a place at the start; the place, as Damisch says, "at the origin of the 'view' proposed *by* the artwork (my emphasis)."[15]

Are we, as readers a century after the writing of Kafū's text, assigned the same "view" that was proposed to readers, *by* the artwork when the piece was first published in the magazine *Taiyō* in 1904?[16] Will

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[10] Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), p. 67.
[11] Cited in Hubert Damisch, *The Origin of Perspective*, trans. John Goodman (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1994), p. xxi.
[12] Ibid., 82.
[13] Ibid., 82.
[14] Ibid., 446.
[15] Ibid., 431.
[16] See in this connection, Mitsuko Iriye, "Translator's introduction," in *American Stories*, trans. Mitsuko Iriye (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000). Kafū's readers, for instance, enjoyed *American Stories* for its exoticism, the

our view come to the same end as those readers before us? Or, does our horizon let us see beyond the limits of past horizons? I have decided to thematize the notion of the "horizon," to expand the horizons of my readings of these texts by Kafū and Okakura to address the question of hermeneutics: Does cultural studies as a critical interpretive approach "fuse horizons" and bring what Gadamer calls the "historical horizon" within which a literary work is created and received into relief with the horizon we currently occupy?[17]

TRUE HORIZON:

The spectacle of the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair attracted more than 19 million visitors and marked the 100-year anniversary of the Louisiana Purchase, which had set a clear precedent for America's recent acquisition of the Philippine Islands and its incursion into Native American territories. America showcased its industrial and artistic resources, as well as its empire, by portraying American imperialism in a utopian light. What set the St. Louis World's Fair apart from those that had preceded it (Chicago in 1893 and Paris in 1900) was that its anthropological exhibition was more extensive than that of any fair to date; the intent of the organizers was to establish, they wrote, "a comprehensive anthropological exhibition, constituting a Congress of Races, and exhibiting particularly the barbarous and semi-barbarous peoples of the world, as nearly as possible in their ordinary and native environments."[18] The exhibits included pygmies from Africa, Patagonian Giants from Argentina, Kwakiutl Indians from Vancouver Island, Native Americans, and Filipinos. Among Japan's exhibits at the fair were eight Ainu.[19] Based on what the organizers claimed was a "scientific approach" to evolution, "progress" in the exhibits was defined by Americans, and races were appraised and compared for their ability to advance from savagery and barbarism to

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intimate portrayal of life in a foreign land. The work's appeal lay in what Meiji readers believed to be the "authenticity" of the experiences of the author.

[17] Gadamer, p. 273.

[18] Cited in Robert Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 160.

[19] Frederick Starr (professor of anthropology at the University of Chicago) was sent by the exposition management as a special commissioner to Japan to select Ainu for the display. See his book, *The Ainu Group at the St. Louis Exposition* (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1904). For a discussion of the Ainu as an "internal Other," see Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, "The Ainu Colonization and the Development of 'Agrarian Japan'–A Symbolic Interpretation," in *New Directions in the Study of Meiji Japan* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp. 656-75.

civilization and enlightenment. If the St. Louis Fair was, in the words of one reporter, "the first creation of the twentieth century,"[20] what it provided its mass audience with was a veritable racial landscape. A racial horizon.

Japan's military victories over Russia coincided with the opening of the fair. The first country at the fair to complete its preparations, it was noted with admiration that Japan "made a brave showing" and "carried on as though peace and serenity reigned in the Orient,"[21] which added to the evaluation of Japan as the "sensation of the Louisiana Exposition."[22] The war with Russia was, as Carol Ann Christ demonstrates, played out on the fairgrounds itself; when Russia withdrew its delegation from the fair, Japan immediately took over its grounds, expanding its display.[23] Japan, intent on fostering pro-Japanese sentiment to garner support against Russia, willingly shouldered the financial burden of participating in the fair.[24] Its exhibition was a great success and had the desired effect, as reflected in the words of a journalist who covered the fair: "At Chicago, the Japanese appeared as interesting and picturesque makers of toys and knickknacks and articles of virtue of characteristic form but limited range—a sort of half-developed, peculiar people, with a hazy past not far removed from actual savagery and with an uncertain future. At St. Louis they appear as one of the first nations of the world."[25] This is the historical backdrop against which Kafū wrote "Inebriated Beauty" and Okakura delivered his speech, "Modern Problems in Painting."

VANISHING POINT ONE: OKAKURA'S AESTHETIC WARFARE

Okakura begins his lecture by expressing Japan's commitment and "reverential attitude toward all true expressions of art."[26] He defends modern Japanese painting by arguing that Western realism should not be the only measure of what constitutes "true" art. Yet, his main concern is not whether painting should be more idealistic and less realistic—whether it must depict "true things" or depend on "truth" (a question he dismisses

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[20] Eric Breitbert, *A World on Display: Photographs from the St Louis World's Fair 1904* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), p. 50.
[21] Hanson, pp. 367 and 369.
[22] Rydell, p. 180.
[23] Christ, p. 686.
[24] Yoshiharu Suenobu, "Nijūseiki no makai–sento ruisu bankokuhaku," in *Nagai Kafū no mita Amerika* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1997), pp. 60-61.
[25] Rydell, p. 181.
[26] Okakura Kakuzō, "Modern Problems in Painting," in *Congress of Arts and Science Universal Exposition, St. Louis, 1904*, vol. 3 (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1906), p. 664.

as personal and belonging exclusively to the artist)—but "the relation of painting to society itself."[27] He presents the *true* problem Japanese artists are faced with as a modern one, brought about by politics, social conditions, and industrialism. The *true* expression of art in Japan is primarily threatened, he explains, by "the onslaught of Western art on our national painting."[28] "What I wish to protest against," he says, "is the attitude of imitation which is so destructive of individuality."[29] It is not a question of whether realism is a "truer" representational form than others, the very act of imitating Western realism is not "true;" to imitate is to copy something original and is not a *true* act in and of itself.[30]

Interestingly, a landscape painting in the *nihonga* style by Hashimoto Gahō, who stands at the beginning of the *nihonga* movement and its philosophy (he was the head teacher at Okakura's Tokyo School of Fine Arts), won a top prize at the fair.[31] Gahō was known for his landscapes, and the prize-winning work at St. Louis, like his other works, is an example of a landscape painting caught in the transition between two terms, "*sansuiga,*" the traditional term for landscape, and "*fūkeiga,*" a new term for landscape that was introduced in the second decade of the Meiji period. Given that Okakura would have facilitated the submission of this work, we might ask how Gahō's landscape qualifies as a "true" expression of art as Okakura defines it. As Richard Okada has noted in "'Landscape' and the Nation-State: A Reading of *Nihon fūkei ron,*" "landscape" is not just an artistic term, but also denotes geographical, topographical space, the political and politicized space of the modernizing nation.[32] How then

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[27] Ibid., p. 668.
[28] Ibid., p. 674.
[29] Ibid., p. 677.
[30] One could ask as an extension of this line of thought, "When does Western-style painting [*yōga*] in Japan cease being "imitative?" At what point is *yōga* considered as Japanese as Japanese-style painting [*nihonga*]?
[31] Gahō's submissions included: *Twilight in Forest* (林澗残照), *Windy Day in Mountain* (山風蕩樹), *Mountain Stream in the Morning* (溪山朝爽), *Winter Morning and Wild Ducks* (雪暁宿雁), *Spring and Autumn* (春浦秋林屏風; pair of screens), *Mount Hōrai and Sunrise* (蓬萊朝陽), *Rain and Snow* (烟雲積雪屏風; pair of screens), *Tinted Leaves and White Stream* (紅葉白水). Kwanjiuro Yamashita's *The Illustrated Catalogue of Japanese Fine Arts Exhibits in the Art Palace at the Louisiana Purchase Expositions, St. Louis, MO* (Kōbe: Kwansai Shashin Seihan Insatsu Goshi Kaisha, 1904) contains black and white reproductions of these works, among others.
[32] Richard Okada, "'Landscape' and the Nation-State: A Reading of *Nihon fū kei ron,*" in *New Directions in the Study of Meiji Japan* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp. 90-107.

do we evaluate Gahō's transitional landscape in relation to the formation of the modern nation, a nation that, as Okakura delivered his speech, was at war, in its own transition from being a "picturesque makers of toys and knickknacks" to becoming "one of the first nations of the world"?[33]

Toward the end of his talk Okakura makes a final appeal to his audience: "It is time, indeed, that we should begin to work for the true adjustment of society to art."[34] This phrase, "the true adjustment of society to art," which brings Okakura's speech to a close, suggests that society will have to answer to its art. A society is built on its art. For Okakura, Japanese painting should not be dismissed as "at one with the bows and arrows of our primitive warfare," for they are "by no means the simple weapons to which they are likened, but a potent machine invented to carry on a special kind of aesthetic warfare."[35] An aesthetic warfare in which Japanese art will finally be seen from a new vantage point (in Okakura's words) "in its true light."[36] The artworks exhibited at the fair were vital to Japan's survival in the international community. Japan's calculation in not withdrawing from the exhibition was tied to the belief that showcasing all of its industrial arts would improve its export economy, funding its war with Russia. More important than the practical economic role art played however, as Okakura suggests, is that art is linked to the perception of Japan as a civilized country. Okakura forges the connection between war and art, art as a form of warfare, which is perhaps among the "truer" aspects of modern Japanese art displayed in St. Louis. At St. Louis the favorable estimation of Japanese art secured Japan's standing in the world, opening up a new horizon for its reception.

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[33] The reputation that Japan built for itself was part of a continuous effort beginning with Japan's participation in the Philadelphia fair of 1876 and the Chicago fair of 1893. As Neil Harris writes, "At Philadelphia, the Japanese made their first entry into the popular consciousness as an exotic but artistic people [...] [a]t Chicago they broadened their claim on public attention [...] emerging as an alternative rather than a supplemental culture, worthy of understanding on its own terms [...] but something more was necessary to raise respect to veneration, and this came about in 1904..." (46). Neil Harris, "All the World's a Melting Pot? Japan at American Fairs, 1876-1904," in *Mutual Images: Essays in American-Japanese Relations*, ed. Akira Iriye (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1975), pp. 24-54.

[34] Okakura, p. 677.

[35] Ibid., p. 675.

[36] Ibid., p. 675.

VANISHING POINT TWO: "THE MOMENT BEFORE THE DREAM"

"Inebriated Beauty" is the story of a painting titled *The Moment before a Dream*, exhibited at the St. Louis World's Fair by an American referred to as "S—," who serves as Kafū's guide to the fair.[37] The painting depicts a nude, a woman of "mixed breed" (she is described alternately by Kafū as having "some Negro blood in her," as well as Egyptian, Arabian, Persian, and Turkish), reclining on a sofa with a half-emptied glass of wine.[38] A Frenchman called Mantéro, who figures as an anthropologist or ethnographer of sorts in his devotion to "the study of women" (*onna no kenkyū*), was destroyed by his infatuation with her, his object of study. As Kafū is brought before the painting, he takes on the role of a viewing subject, to whom S— remarks, "It may be that such a subject shouldn't be included in art."[39] The question that S— raises, "What constitutes an appropriate subject for a *true* work of art?" could also be asked of the "racial landscapes," the anthropological exhibits that dominate the fair. As the literary critic Minami Asuka observes, "The imperialist nature of the St. Louis Fair is embodied in the discussion of this *bijinga*."[40] The moment that he is trying to capture in this painting, says S—, is "That very moment of entering dreamland," the moment that "she [the woman] believes is nothing short of paradise."[41] What is this final moment of consciousness that the woman experiences before entering the realm of the dream; what is made conscious in this figure of the woman and her "indescribable expression"? Of what will she dream? Will it be of a new unity against the racial hierarchy promoted at the fair, its successive stages of "evolution" replaced by superposition and juxtaposition? What is the position of Kafū, as a Japanese—a viewing subject caught between East and West—in relation to this artwork?

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[37] "Inebriated Beauty" was published in *American Stories* with three postcards sent by Kafū from the fair printed on its opening page. Characters from the title "Suibijin" are assigned to each of the images: *sui* (inebriated or drunken) overlays the photograph of what appears to be the Japanese pavilion; *bi* (beauty) the photograph of the Palace of Fine Arts; and *jin* (person or people) the photograph of the United States Government Building. Thus, the story begins with Japan "intoxicated," and "beauty" allocated to the museum of Western art—which could be interpreted to signal perhaps that Japan is intoxicated by Western beauty as defined by the Americans.

[38] Nagai Kafū, "Inebriated Beauty," in *American Stories*, trans. Mitsuko Iriye (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), pp, 40, 37, 43.

[39] Ibid., p. 37.

[40] Minami Asuka, "Hakurankai wo mita hito: *Amerika monogatari*, 'Suibijin' yori," *Hikaku bungaku nenshi* 29 (1993): 88.

[41] Kafū, p. 42.

St. Louis is where Kafū encounters twentieth-century America for the first time, and the first few pages of "Inebriated Beauty" contain reflective, introspective moments in which he describes St. Louis and its outlying landscape. He writes, for instance, "Here it was cool, with breezes whispering among the tree leaves. In the meadows visible beyond the woods, cattle were mooing languidly in the summer afternoon, while in the fields at the back of nearby houses, hens were starting to cackle. It was *as if I were in a dream*, recalling the hustle and bustle of St. Louis that I had left behind only one hour earlier (my emphasis)."[42] When he attends the fair the following day, he sums up his impression of it, exclaiming: "An extraordinary nightless city! This surely is one of the magical worlds created by the wealth of the Americans."[43] The "nightless city" is one that never sleeps, a city caught perpetually in the moment before a dream. A world with no unconscious, no consciousness of itself; the bright lights of St. Louis do not enlighten, but are part of the self-illuminating spectacle that America presents. Kafū continues, "I was simply dumbfounded and looked around as if in a daze, but as for S— [...] whenever a particularly young and beautiful woman passed, he nodded to himself and closely watched her ..."[44]

The rural landscape of twentieth-century America makes Kafū feel "as if [he] were in a dream," the space of a dream in which subjectivity fluctuates and is uncertain, while the magical world of the fair leaves him "dumbfounded" (*bōzen*). Thus, taking his cue from S—, he begins to build another arena of desire and visuality. In the pages that follow, Kafū creates a situation in which he too views a woman, the woman in the painting, so that he can see himself as a viewer of *The Moment before a Dream*, "from without, as another would see [him], installed in the midst of the visible, in the process of considering it from a certain spot."[45] Kafū transposes his subjective presence, constituted initially before the American rural landscape, cityscape, and the fairgrounds, to the figure of the woman. "What do you think?" asks S— as he finishes telling Kafū the story that inspired his painting, "Mantéro died doing what he wanted to do [study women], just like a warrior dying in war, so I applaud him even as I am saddened."[46] The pursuit of art, sacrificing oneself to the artwork of the woman, is likened to war and once again art and war are brought into coordination, here, over the body of the mixed-race woman. Kafū becomes

[42] Ibid., p. 36.
[43] Ibid., p. 39.
[44] Ibid., p. 39.
[45] This is what Merleau-Ponty describes in *The Visible and the Invisible* as a "palpitation of the gaze." Cited in Damisch, p. 46.
[46] Ibid., p. 44.

aware of his own otherness, reassessing his subjective position within an established paradigm, first against landscape and then against the pictorial figure of this *bijin*. The woman becomes one vanishing point on the racial horizon, a horizon through which Kafū *invents* and situates himself in the world, with a worldview, in which the possibility of a new statement and perspective on "true" art is made visible.[47]

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[47] I inflect the word "invent" here to resonate with one of Damisch's theses about the history of the perspective paradigm. He writes, "If there is any aspect of perspective that is worth examining yet again, it is this movement, ["constitutive of the paradigm as such, that continuously prompts a return to its own origins"], always resumed and always resumable, because always obstructed and of necessity destined to failure, there being no origin save one that is an *invention*, in all senses of the word" (Ibid., p. 47).

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