

## **Ode aus Japan – Japan in Berlin**

with works by Takayuki Daikoku, Renate Hampke, Mayako Kubo, Taiyoh Mori, Teppei Miyaki, Cornelia Nagel, Kazuki Nakahara, Ursula Sax, Ken'ichiro Taniguchi, Hitomi Uchikura and Tomoyuki Ueno

The reunification of Germany, accompanied by the intense wave of globalization, has accelerated the exchange between nations. Berlin, as a new international hotspot for contemporary art—especially in production—has given rise to a larger community of Japanese artists here. The Japanese community is one of many, not least due to the long history of Japanese art's connection with Europe, which laid the foundation for this exchange.

The emergence of European modernism is closely linked to the inspiration of African tribal art, but also to the reception of Japanese woodblock printing by the French Impressionists and the German Expressionists (cf. the artist groups *Der Blauer Reiter* and *Die Brücke*). The 1862 World's Fair in London and, in particular, the 1867 World's Fair in Paris are of great significance in this context. By 1878, Japanese woodblock prints were available in numerous shops in Paris. Private collectors in Munich exhibited their treasures early on and were a major source of inspiration for the German Expressionists. Franz Marc (co-founder of the *Blauer Reiter* group of artists) owned several Japanese woodblock prints that he had acquired in Paris.

Even back then, the woodblock prints by Katsushika Hokusai were particularly popular. He produced over 4,000 prints featuring numerous motifs of Mount Fuji and other subjects, many of which were created for the European market.

*The Wave* is his most famous motif, represented as a graphic print in renowned museum collections worldwide.

As early as 1931, a comprehensive exhibition featuring nearly 140 contemporary Japanese artists was held at the Prussian Academy of Arts in cooperation with Japan, the Berlin State Museums, and several members of the Prussian Academy of Arts in Berlin.

The fact that Semjon Contemporary represents two Japanese artists—Hitomi Uchikura and Takayuki Daikoku—is yet another reason to broaden our horizons and bring them into dialogue with their colleagues.

In order to create a visual anchor point for the historical connection between Berlin and Japan—borrowing Hokusai's Wave is impossible for a small private gallery—the idea arose to ask the two gallery artists Renate Hampke and Ursula Sax to create a contemporary interpretation of the artist's famous wave.

In addition, the title of the current exhibition is borrowed from a work of the same name by Renate Hampke (born in 1935, like Ursula Sax), in which a found object from Tokyo plays a significant role. She created the work in 2015 after her trip to Japan.

A third non-Japanese artist, Cornelia Nagel, is included in this exhibition with her raku ceramics, which are also highly regarded in Japan. She took the opposite path and learned the ancient Japanese cultural technique of raku. The Raku Museum in Kyoto owns several examples of her work; in 2016/17, Semjon Contemporary dedicated a solo exhibition to her.

All of the Japanese artists represented in this exhibition live in Berlin or have lived here for a formative period of time. The only "non-Berliner" is Teppei Miyaki, who, however, spent several weeks in the city two years ago when Takayuki Daikoku had his solo exhibition at Semjon Contemporary and he accompanied him here as a fellow artist.

What all the Japanese artists featured in the exhibition have in common is that they have managed to retain their own national identity while living up to the expectation of being perceived as international artists, and they embody this convincingly in their work.

The quality of their works lies precisely in the fact that their origins and influences in Japan are not denied in their work, but that they have all developed their own universal artistic language that incorporates their experiences in the European and global art world. The work breathes both cultures and is entirely unique, creating a formal synthesis between these worlds.

One element that runs through all these works of art can be extracted: it is the absolute concentration on form and structure, which is self-sufficient and at the same time materializes a concentrated power in stoic calm.

As a bridge between the visual and the musical, composer Mayako Kubo will create a short piece of music that will be performed by singer Miho Kinoshita (Deutsche Oper) on the opening night. The composition itself will be on display as a drawing. If you can't read music, it's just itself, a system of symbols, a drawing. This was already explored in the 2014 drawing exhibition *Lieber Künstler, zeichne mir!* (Dear Artist, Draw Me!) at Semjon Contemporary, which featured over 70 artists, including four composers.

*Ode aus Japan* aims to present excerpts from Berlin's rich art scene through selected artists, which is decisively shaped by various communities, in this case the Japanese-German community, and has helped to establish and consolidate our city's international reputation. The whole is the sum of its parts.

Semjon H. N. Semjon, November/ Dezember 2025

A detailed text about the artists and their works will follow later.