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## The Japanese Aesthetic

1. The Japanese have a distinct aesthetic and set of values that is readily apparent in their various forms of art and in the way they choose to live their lives. They focus on a refined beauty that embodies the time and the moral values they believe are the most important. For example a great deal of their arts involve honoring the seasons. This is readily apparent in ikebana, or flower arranging, where the entire piece is created to reflect the current season, both in shape and the materials it is constructed out of, which are usually plants that represent the current season. This appreciation for nature can be found in other things as well, such as parks, ukiyo-e, and even in the practices of the Geisha. But the strongest example of this harmony with nature can be seen in the day to day lives of the Japanese people. The Japanese language comprises of hundreds of words simply to describe various weather states and natural events. Rain and wind in particular are especially descriptive in their descriptions. Some places in Japan have even gone so far in their harmony with nature that they design entire towns to be as unobtrusive to the natural environment as possible. Within this love of the natural world is a respect for the supernatural world as well. They attribute many parts of nature and their importance to spirits, or “kami”, that reside in the natural environment. Much of their architecture and art is created to respect and reflect the gods and spirits in the world. One of the greatest places of Japanese spiritual belief and aesthetic appreciation is Mt. Fuji. Not only is Mt. Fuji considered a holy place and a natural

wonder, but it is even greatly featured in many pieces of art and acts as a symbol of Japan. Ukiyo-e in particular often features Mt. Fuji. Some of the most famous pieces of Ukiyo-e function as travel guides, showing how to traverse the area around Mt. Fuji and how important the mountain itself is for the people and their spiritual beliefs. Much of Japanese art focuses on bringing out the inner beauty of the piece itself, and does not rely on glamour and extravagance to be of value. This reflects the Japanese belief in appreciating something for what it is and finding the beauty in that.

2. After WWII, Japan was in complete disarray, and struggling to rebuild itself. The art culture and trade made great strides in helping them accomplish this. The people took to the classic arts to both attempt to heal their souls and reunite the country. Focusing on tradition and expression helped the Japanese people feel like part of a whole and reconnected them with their roots. On top of this the rest of the world was taking notice and becoming infatuated with the aesthetics and art of Japan, appreciating the skill and beauty of the crafts. This sparked a great deal of trade and design influence in the west from the Japanese culture. Interior design especially drew a lot of attention. Great artists and businessmen such as Tiffany of Tiffany glass fame were heavily inspired by and incorporated Japanese design into their works. This craze for Japanese art helped a great deal economically and in healing the rifts between countries. To this day Japanese art and culture,

especially in the entertainment and robotics industries, heavily affect western culture and the perception of the Japanese.

3. Personally, I have learned a great deal about the historical aspects of Japanese art. I love Japan, so on some level I had an understanding of the values and aesthetics, and I had heard snippets of information on various forms of art throughout my life. But it was very interesting learning the reasons behind various art forms and how they were historically important to the Japanese people. The religious aspects of their beliefs were also very new and interesting to me, as that was something I had little experience in. What many Americans, myself included, believe of Japan is what they see in media and from things like anime. While those can still be good indicators and educators, they do not really help one understand the historical context and cultural significance of various practices and arts in Japan. I definitely have a newfound appreciation for Japanese arts and aesthetics.