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Refining the Past

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Abstract

In this paper I examine two ways in which the past manifests as central to Japanese visual aesthetics. Although distinct, both are manifestations of an attitude that places value on the past, characterizing Japanese (and, to a large measure, East Asian generally) aesthetic thinking. The first is situated

in action, with the use of models inherited from past masters in the creation of art, exemplified in the practice of pictorial and calligraphic copying, and the way of tea. The second is situated in objects and values identified with patina and antiqueness. The attention given to the past in art practice, appreciation, and theory is a point of contrast with Western art theory.

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