

## Claude Monet's *La Japonaise* (1876) and the Other Side of the Kimono

Hyounghee Kong, Pennsylvania State University

This paper focuses on what is painted—and, in turn, not painted—in Claude Monet's *La Japonaise* (1876). The sparse scholarly attention has centered on the artist's relations to the painting—what truths it betrays about his marriage, whether he owned the painted kimono, and, if not, where he saw it. These inquiries, privileging of authorial indices and intentions, give a short shrift to the painting and the imaginative possibilities beyond the painted surface.

This paper teases out the painting's gestures toward queer imaginaries that we have missed. It centers on speculating what is not visualized: the kimono's left front panel. Taking cues from Japanese art historians' recent studies, I suggest that this side of the gown would have featured a figure of a Japanese woman. Assuming this woman was embroidered at roughly the same height as the samurai figure visualized in the painting, her head would have been placed around the model's groin. This imagined/virtual bodily proximity takes on sexual connotations in relation to the popular misuse of the kimono as a dressing gown that wraps the wearer's lightly clad body. Through this imaginary refiguration of bodily relations between the two women, I mark a queer space beyond the realm of the visible that accommodates non-heteronormative sensualities. In so doing, I attempt to reconstruct the dressed figure that has been lost to us multiple times—in her flattening in paint, in the loss of the garment, and in the normative vectors of power-knowledge in art history.

**Hyounghee Kong** is a Ph.D. Candidate in Art History at Pennsylvania State University. Her dissertation, entitled "Fleshly *Japonisme*: The Taste for Japan and Women's Bodies in France 1871–1914," examines French women's corporeal and imaginary consumption of ideas of Japan. Focusing the prominent yet rarely studied sensorial aspects of *japonisme*, such as donning kimonos, applying Japan-inspired fragrant cosmetics, and handling trinkets, prints, and photographs, it analyzes the ways in which *japonisme* promised these women occasions to reimagine their bodies and pleasures outside the discursively Western gender and sexual norms. Her research has been supported by fellowships from the Smithsonian Institute and the Huntington.