

Libraries make me sick.  
—Nietzsche

arts

## Japanese posters: now and Zen A New Regime at Founders College

By HENRY SUM

"They've always had a history of eclecticism. Their nature is as synthesizers, to adapt," said Art Gallery of York University (AGYU) curator Elizabeth McLuhan during a preview of their current show entitled "The Compelling Image: Contemporary Japanese Posters."

"They're not bowled over by current technology or Western culture because they have a history of synthesis," continued McLuhan. "They got into hi-tech and out-did the western designers yet they remain uniquely themselves."

Indeed, when one looks at the profusion of rich imagery on view in this show, the 'hi-tech' theme plays a reasonably large part. The Japanese themselves must be surprised by the enormous leap in imagery from a culture famous for its "ukiyo-e" woodblock prints to their current brave new world of computers, shopping malls and robots.

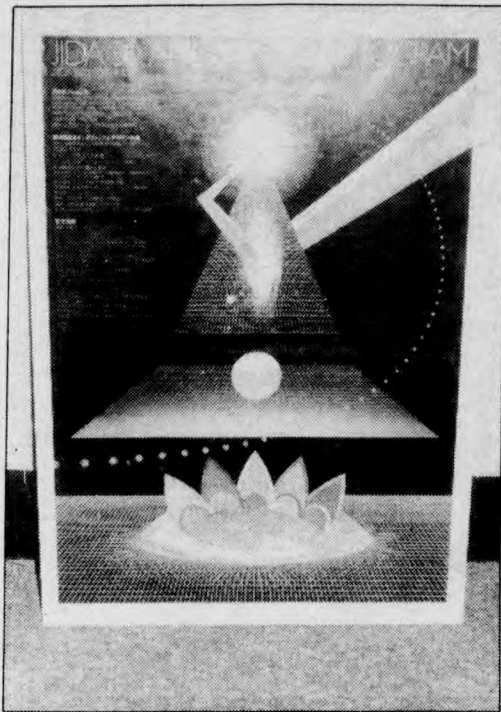
Consider the poster by Yoshio Okada entitled "Village of the Crescent Moon." The designer has blended a traditional village scene from the 18th century which shows straw brimmed villagers gazing up at a sky filled with flying saucers. Tradition meets 'hi-tech'? You bet, but for all their technological expertise, another poster suggests that the Japanese may be suffering an identity crisis.

Shigenobu Nagaishu's private poster "Oriental Mystery" portrays a geisha leisurely stroking her neck while her other hand fingers a computer console. A striking black lightning bolt appears to be connecting the TV screen of the computer with the eyes of the geisha. Tradition absorbed by 'hi-tech'? There's no stopping the process now, according to the thrust of a poster entitled "WAVE."

The enormous headline, "WAVE," of this poster is set in some obscure typeface which resembles "swastika-futura condensed." The poster depicts an ocean wave which laps upon an empty beach while a fish-eye bubble containing a modern sky-scrapered city looms above the horizon. Designed to promote the opening of a shopping complex, one wonders how long before this complex caters exclusively to mechanical automatons and robots.

Examine the gleaming stainless steel finish of one of these future inhabitants in the poster illustrated by Hajime Sorayama. Designed to advertise a book fair on micro-computers, the poster displays a sexy, half-dressed female robot. The robot being a similarity to Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* automaton but with added sultry, glamor-queen attributes. The swelling breasts, red puckered lips and languorous eyes manifests another preoccupation of this exhibition—sex.

If the nude female figure isn't coated in aluminum then it's dress in saran-wrap or concealed by a sheet of blue nylon. One private poster entitled "Fresh Fruit" exhibits the upper torso of a young woman sheathed in glistening cellophane. The poster is accompanied with apples and a fragment from some old erotic woodcut of a hotly embracing couple. Sex, according to this designer, is packaged, merchandized and is



Contemporary Japanese Posters on view at AGYU until December 14.

as readily available as your nearby groceries.

If sex can be commercialized, why not exploit religion too? In fact, why not use sex to exploit it? A bold, enticing poster for "Zen" perfume does just this with its sensual photograph of a dark-haired, mysterious young woman who has presumably bitten off the belt of her lover's kimono. The poster demonstrates a notable characteristic of Japanese design: their daring use of empty space. Compare this "Zen" poster with the refined use of space in the "CITY" poster by Takao Yamada which promotes yet another shopping complex. Yamada has not only reduced the components of a woman's face into a surrealistic icon but has left a greater portion of this space empty and mirage-like. Space dominates other posters promoting dance performances, photo exhibits, even red whales.

The theme of war and peace haunts the poster designers as much as the nation. "NO MORE HIBAKUSHA" is one such poster. "HIBAKUSHA" stands for the "victims of the atomic bomb." The headline is set in capital letters which have been shattered as if by an explosion. This headline and a ghostly gauze mask, with masking tape appendages, floats eerily upon a red background.

There is one poster that deserves particular attention and deep consideration. "How hot it must have been, Miyako" presents us with the burnt, left-over belongings of Hiroshima victims. The viewer pauses to contemplate while he examines the blasted remnants of a child's lunch box, a soldier's scorched binoculars and a woman's charred sandal.

In a more positive vein, Iwao Matsura's poster, "All we need is peace," has green celestial globes (flying saucers, again?) falling out of a deep red outer space—our only salvation? If so, then we've been waiting along with the "Villagers of the Crescent Moon" for a long time.

## Cricket launches film career

By W.E. OVERTON

Peter Greenaway is best known for his film *The Draughtsman's Contract*, impressive for both its striking photography and elegant, witty dialogue. Prior to this film he directed several non-mainstream productions, three of which were screened recently in Toronto: *A Walk Through H*, *The Falls*, and *Windows*. Absurd and personal, these films seem to be the proper antecedents to *Draughtsman* with their close attention to *mise-en-scene* and language. Themes that are almost obsessive in his earlier films—ornithology, painting, cartography, cataloguing and gardens—are evident in varying degrees in *Draughtsman*. He said that with this film he was "trying to reach as wide an audience as possible with a minimum amount of compromise."

In conversation Greenaway talks intelligently and articulately on such disparate subjects as his film productions and British filmmaking to cartography and obsolete Russian time zones.

After attending public school, Greenaway opted to go to Art College against his parents' expectations. He studied painting, which remains as important to him as filmmaking. Greenaway feels that his background in paint-

ing has allowed him to look analytically at the things around him, providing for him his best grounding for making films.

His interest in film began oddly when a cricket match was cancelled because of rain. He went instead to see Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* and left the theatre fascinated with the concept that film could be used to express ideas. For the following five years Greenaway viewed intensively a wide variety of films which contributed another important aspect to his abilities as a filmmaker. He cites Alain Resnais, Jean-Luc Godard and Michelangelo Antonioni as being the directors who have most influenced him.

Greenaway has a number of projects underway. He has three feature-length screenplays written and the prospects are very good for one of them to go into production soon. In conjunction with Michael Nyman, who has composed the scores for a number of his films, Greenaway is working on an opera. He recently completed a documentary on contemporary American composers and is writing a screenplay for Robertson Davies' *A Mixture of Fraillies*. Among the projects he has been offered he smilingly mentions a remake of Fellini's *8½*.

By KEVIN CONNOLLY

On Friday night Founders College will play host to *New Regime*, an 'upwardly mobile' band from the Toronto-area. Existing under the present name for the past two and a half years, *New Regime* is essentially a new music band, playing what lead singer Kevin Connelly (no relation) describes as "hard-edged dance music."

The five-man ensemble is a mixture of youth and experience: Connelly and drummer Neil Taylor are comparative newcomers to the music scene, while other band members have been involved with various outfits for as long as 10 years.

Neil McMullen, the band's guitarist, will perhaps be remembered for his stint with Dee Dee and the Explosives, a group thought to be on the verge of success three years ago, but which ultimately disbanded.

Friday night's performance will be the band's last for two months, as they will go straight from Founders into the studio next week to record a debut album for RCA Records at Sounds Interchange in Toronto.

The album is a venture that Connelly looks forward to with both enthusiasm and trepidation.

## Prague czechs in as only winner

*Agnes of God*

by John Pielmeier  
Bathurst Street Theatre  
until December 15

*Prisoners of Time*

by Laszlo Barna  
Toronto Free Theatre  
until December 16

*Prague*

by John Krizanc  
Tarragon Theatre  
until December 16

By JASON SHERMAN

*Agnes of God* seems to have gotten away with murder in more ways than one. First of all, the play wowed 'em in New York City, a feat which must have had more to do with the production than the text. The play features three stock characters in what has already become a stock situation, that of a nun who has given birth. That the nun probably murdered the child and must stand trial is a nice twist, but one which is dealt with sensationally. Let's face it, a religious fanatic with the screaming meemies is a throwback to at least *The Crucible* where it is just as ridiculous, a psychologist who has lost her faith because of an incident from her childhood, and a Mother Superior who says Bullshit yourself and used to smoke and have babies—well, none of it is new and neither is the mystery. Presumably, the search for faith of each woman is supposed to come to some sort of interrelating climax. In fact, there is relatively little movement in the psychological development of these characters, and the dualism behind such terms as trial, sister and mother are used to little better effect than punning.

The staging is often awkward, as in the entirely unbelievable hypnosis sequence ("It's time for . . . the hypnosis!") says the psychologist). Here the doctor moves two chairs so that poor Agnes does not hurt her convulsing self. Fair enough, but does she really need to sprint to the opposite side of the stage with them? The acting is little more than capable; which is to say, given the text, the acting capably demonstrates its weaknesses. Shirley Douglas does a wonderful stand-up routine, but the sudden switch from wise-cracking nun to understanding penitent makes her character not pathetic, just poorly conceived.

*Prisoners of Time*, downstairs at the Free Theatre, is truly terrible and hardly worth the space needed to demonstrate it so. The two-levelled set overwhelms by its sheer scope, planning and detail, but we can stare at pink and green for only so long. This, in fact, proves a more fruitful exercise than staring at or listening to, usually in disbelief, the play. *Prisoners* is an uninspired "comedy" which pretends to deal with the lost ideals of the '60s youth and the misuses of a privately operated old age home. That makes sense. In fact, just what is going on is difficult to pin down, chiefly because of a script so poor it transcends pity and enters the realm of insulting. We simply do not have the space to point out its many deficiencies, which, in any case, is the job of the

"Getting a record contract is like getting a licence for your car," Connelly said. "You've still got to drive it. Either you make a career for yourself, or you screw yourself up so you don't get a second chance."

Still, Connelly exudes an air of confidence about the band's music, and feels that the blend of youth and experience will provide a stable foundation on which to build. Connelly is also keenly aware of the odds against great financial success. "Let's face it, nobody's in music for the money," he said. "Those types of successes are just too rare."

Connelly maintains that the vastly different demands of the American market make it difficult for a Canadian band to break south of the border, while the heavy reliance of new Canadian bands on European influences often precludes success abroad. "It is harder for a Canadian band to be credible in Europe simply because their influences are two years old," he said.

"Totally message-oriented bands can become as tedious as marshmallow pop bands; you have to know when to be serious and when to have fun," says Connelly, adding, "you can still be a good pop band and have something to say."

Free Theatre's workshops. However, as criticism should never go unsubstantiated, here is an example of what the playwright must think of as a "funny" situation: an old man rolls marijuana cigarettes and feeds a few seeds to a caged bird. Hysterical. But that's just the visual humor. It is the dialogue which demonstrates Mr Barna's subtle approach to the art of playwrighting, as when the same old man has an argument with a friend: Get out of this room, she says. I can't, he says. Why not? she asks. It's my room, he says. Mr Barna seems to have taken the worst elements of popular American comedy—Cheech and Chong and Neil Simon—and claimed them for his very own. Well, Mr Barna, they are all yours—take them, far, far away.



Shirley Douglas in *Agnes of God*

*Prague*, the new play at the Tarragon Theatre, is superior theatre in every way. A tight script that deals intelligently with subject matter on more than one level, tight direction that has play, players and audience under control, and ensemble acting which, though not entirely even, is so vital that we forget its unevenness. *Prague* deals ostensibly with the rights and freedoms of artists, specifically theatre artists, under an oppressive government specifically that of Czechoslovakia. What it really is about, or in addition is about, is the limit to which truth (rights and freedoms in another sense) can be represented in the theatre. *Prague* begins by appearing to treat a specific political situation based on the assumptions of its expected audience. These ideas are soon turned upside down, paralleling the manipulation of authority figures. Take the example of the police detective who ambles on stage from the audience space wearing trench-coat and fedora. Our initial expectations are immediately challenged when he belts out a tune. It turns out he wants to emulate Frank Sinatra. This sort of comic exaggeration makes the character at once the type and a parody of the tough-talking no-nonsense detective, a notion further deconstructed when he turns out to be not the man he claims. This sort of duality is a measure not only of the theatre group in the play, but the theatre group putting on *Prague*. The production begins with a trick in the theatre we are in—a false start to the play—and ends with a trick in the theatre the play is set in. Highly recommended.