

## Happy Painting: Schema Analysis of Utagawa Kuniyoshi's giga works from the Perspective of Composition art

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**Abstract:** Utagawa Kuniyoshi's giga works have a variety of schemata, which contain the humanistic spirit of constant exploration and deep thinking on the meaning of form in humor, and express the Japanese life interest and entertainment spirit in the Edo period with new and unique schema language. This article starts with the analysis of the schematic composition of Utagawa Kuniyoshi's giga works, and deeply distinguishes and analyzes the aspects of image and text blending - an intimate game of text and graphics, mimicry and isomorphism - the expression of body interest, stacking refactorion - the peculiar "Yosega". It points out that Utagawa Kuniyoshi's giga works embody emotions in banter, integrating the daily life of the masses, Japanese history and culture, and social reality, Reflect the beauty of composition in lively paintings, showcasing a wonderful realm of interweaving reality and non reality.  
**Keywords:** Utagawa Kuniyoshi; giga; Composition; Edo; Entertainment spirit

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1798-1861), one of the late masters of the Ukiyoe Kogawa School, was born in the Edo period of Japan, and was known as the "Ichinिसai" and "Asazakurarou". Utagawa Kuniyoshi created a large number of giga works (Paintings which are characterized by comicality and satire) throughout his life. These works were once considered as 'artless and childish cartoons'.

However, to this day, once again examining this 'child coaxing Ukiyoe', it contains incredible wisdom. (Shinichi, 2020) Whether it is graphics and text processing, language in composition forms, or spatial layout and transformation, they are all appropriate, making people feel the unique charm of artistic forms.

Utagawa Kuniyoshi's giga works are relaxed and humorous, reflecting all aspects of the life of the people in the Edo period. They reflect the beauty of composition in interesting paintings, showing a wonderful realm of

reality and unreality. Utagawa Kuniyoshi inherited the inherent spirit of Japanese Ukiyoe art and innovated in his giga works, demonstrating outstanding wisdom and tireless exploration spirit. He indulged in the daily subtle family life, visited the great rivers and mountains of Japan, and found the game elements and composition forms in paintings.

In humor, he implied the humanistic spirit of continuous exploration and deep thinking on the meaning of form, and interpreted the Japanese life interest and entertainment spirit in the Edo period with new and unique schema language.

## 2. IMAGE AND TEXT BLENDING - AN INTIMATE GAME BETWEEN TEXT AND GRAPHICS

Formation has the meaning of formation and creation. In the field of design, it refers to the creative combination of certain morphological elements in accordance with visual laws, mechanical principles, psychological characteristics, and aesthetic principles. Laszlo Moholy Nagy, a pioneer artist of Bauhaus, believes that "composition expresses the pure form of nature, namely, direct color, rhythm of space, and balance of form (Laszlo, 2020)".

Utagawa Kuniyoshi's giga works spare no effort to mix words and graphics in various forms in painting, starting from the shape, structure, pronunciation, meaning and other elements of words, Let people feel the fun and artistic charm of the combination of text and graphics in their works. When Kandinsky pointed out the role of form composition, "For form, our discussion of pure pictorial composition has a dual purpose: to form the entire picture; to create various forms. These forms serve the entire picture through different relationships between each other.

Numerous objects of expression (concrete, abstract, purely abstract) It must be considered as a whole and arranged according to the needs of the whole. Individual and scattered objects of expression are almost meaningless, only when they are conducive to the overall effect, they have meaning.(Zhou, 2007) ' Utagawa Kuniyoshi emphasizes the harmonious relationship between text and graphics in such works, and through clever combinations, intersperses, and echoes of the two, the precise arrangement of graphics and text forms a meaningful form. There are roughly three ways to construct such giga works:

Type 1: Using graphics to form text. Utagawa Kuniyoshi's work "The Cat Character" Fugu "(Figure 1) is an outstanding work that combines cats

and fish into a text image set. The graphics of cats and fish are combined in the screen to form the 'pufferfish' (ふぐ, fugu). Utagawa Kuniyoshi, who loves cats, often creates paintings based on the theme of cats. This painting, full of game spirit, is depicted excellently, with the shapes of ten cats and three fish carefully designed according to the changes in text structure.

Each cat's movements are vivid and natural, yet each one is different, and the three fish seem to have been given a human expression, with a hint of disdain in their cunning, which makes people feel happy.

Type 2: Text painting. The Fat Faced Ugly Woman After Three rounds of Drinking (Figure 2) is one of the representative works of Utagawa Kuniyoshi. This work is a type of good fortune Painting. The characters in the painting are not only the contours of their faces and bodies, but also the patterns on their hair and kimonos, all of which are composed of the pseudonym "hu". Picture praise as follow: After three rounds of drinking, the fat woman smiled and smiled.

Every brush has its own seal, gathering brings blessings to the hall. The work vividly depicts a plump "ugly" woman in a kimono sitting on the ground, holding her cheeks in one hand to show off her charm, and smiling brightly. After reading it, one couldn't help but laugh blankly. Compared to the exquisite and indifferent beauty pictures, such scenes are clearly closer to the daily lives of the people and can more resonate with the people in the streets.



**Figure 1:** Cat script "pufferfish"

Large format Ichinisai Utagawa Kuniyoshi. From the 14th year of Tenpo era to the 4th year of Koka era (1843-1847)  
The Ichōkaya Sennosuke Edition



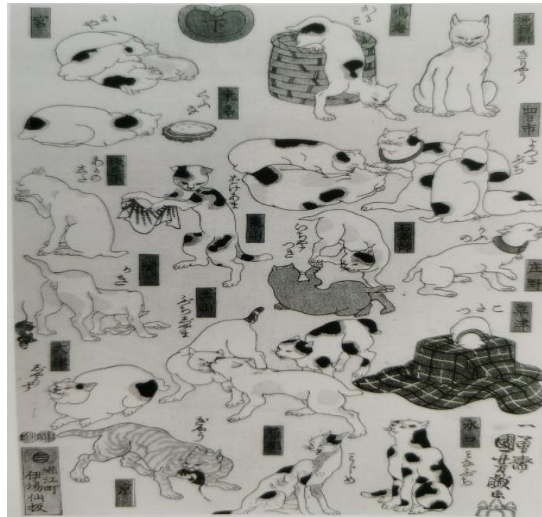
**Figure 2:** (Good Fortune Painting) Fat faced woman after three rounds of drinking  
Large format Ichinिसai Utagawa Kuniyoshi. From the fourth year of Koka era to the fifth year of Kaei era (1847-1852). Carved edition

Type 3: Conversion of text and graphics. There are two forms of this type of work, one is called "Hannjie", which is a guessing game based on the picture, and the other is called "Kutie". In contrast to "Hannjie", it is a work of converting a paragraph or idiom into another with a similar pronunciation, and then drawing its meaning into a painting. In the late Edo period, "Hannjie" and "Kutie" have become a kind of intellectual games, which are very popular among ordinary people. Utagawa Kuniyoshi depicted the names of samurai in interesting and even nonsensical graphics in "Samurai Hannjie", seemingly casual but thoughtful, creating game works suitable for public appreciation and participation. In "Fifty Three Cats Kutie", Utagawa Kuniyoshi humorously portrays the names of the fifty three stations in Tokaido, Japan, with his favorite cat in the painting. For example: nihonbashi—shinagawa—shirokao, kawasaki—kabayak, kanagawa—kagukawa... Due to Utagawa Kuniyoshi's meticulous observation, these cats are depicted vividly and vividly on paper.



**Figure 3:** Samurai Hannjie

Tenfold edition Ichinisisai Utagawa Kuniyoshi .From the fourth year of Koka era to the fifth year of Kaei era (1847-1852). The Wakasaya Yoichi Edition



**Figure 4:** Fifty Three Cats Kutie (One of them)

Large format Triple page Ichinिसai Utagawa Kuniyoshi. From the fourth year of Koka era to the fifth year of Kaei era (1847-1852). The Ichōkaya Sennosuke Edition

Utagawa Kuniyoshi incorporated "perceptual analysis" into "dynamic intuition" during the process of image and text blending, as Kandinsky said, by considering numerous objects of expression based on the whole (Li & Xue, 2014).

Through the interaction of rational thinking and visual thinking, intuition fully belongs to the creation of composition, reflecting the coordination and consistency between text and graphics in the form of composition, and the mutual transformation between static and dynamic, thus achieving a relative balance in visual perception, Through meticulous observation of daily life and contemplation of the order of the depicted objects, guided by their composition, the vivid and vivid imagery is discovered.

### 3. MIMICRY AND ISOMORPHISM - THE EXPRESSION OF BODY INTEREST

Utagawa Kuniyoshi's giga works, like other Ukiyoe works of the same era, emphasize attention to the human body. But its starting point is not about eroticism and romance, but rather focuses on the relationship between the whole and the parts. By grasping the organic connections between various elements in the picture, it mobilizes the subjective initiative of the viewer and independently constructs interesting images.

Imitation is a commonly used technique in "Shadow painting" works. The painter carefully observes the form of objects, connects them with real characters, scenes, dynamics, etc. through rich associations and imagination, and uses contrast to express the overall and partial perception



of visual perception, thereby confirming the basic impression and psychological suggestion of visual perception. In the work "Hunter and the Beaver - Goldfish and the Red Carp" (Figure 5), the left image depicts a hunter lying on the ground disheartened, with his shotgun and headscarf falling in front of him. Behind him squats a beaver with outstretched arms, and the hunter seems to have become the object of the beaver in front of him. Looking at the picture on the right again, erasing all the details, it turns out to be just two goldfish and one red carp! Upon seeing this, the audience couldn't help but laugh heartily at the scene, and the gaming spirit of the Edo people is fully reflected here.



**Figure 5:** Its posture is very vivid Hunters and Beavers Goldfish and Red Carp  
Large format Double page Ichinisai Utagawa Kuniyoshi  
From the fourth year of Koka era to the fifth year of Kaei era (1847- 1852)  
The Kamitsuya Iwakura Edition

Another type of work by Utagawa Kuniyoshi exaggerates the depiction of human bodies, skillfully handling complex compositions and finding visual balance through the symbiotic relationship between form and form. Utagawa Kuniyoshi also pays special attention to the balance of forces between graphics in composition, paying attention to coordinating the positions of visual centers and non visual centers, and paying special attention to the smoothness and rationality of graphic connections, with vivid and interesting morphological expressions.

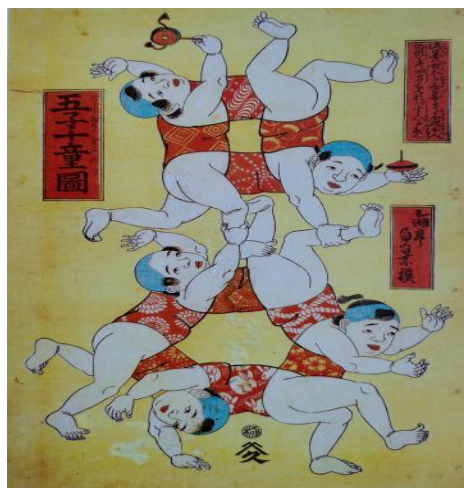
The "Yawn Stop Printed Cloth" (Figure 6) is a masterpiece of this type of work. This artwork depicts the scene where the characters in the painting place their hands on each other's noses or mouths to prevent them from yawning. Under the title, it is written that 'fourteen people form thirty-five people'. Perhaps because if you count the number of people in the painting carefully, you won't feel bored and won't yawn. The work applies the design principle of the five sons and ten children diagram (Figure 7), in which two

or three people share a head or a lower body. By combining in this way into a human body. Among them, there are carpenters wearing aprons, blind monks, etc., who vividly depict the thirty-five lives of different classes such as the town people, samurai, and the aristocracy on printed fabrics. Utagawa Kuniyoshi meticulously designs the symbiotic relationship between character movements and the body, allowing viewers to feel the flow and fun of the picture in a vivid human state, allowing the viewer's vision to intersect with the painter's emotions and generate rich associations.



**Figure 6:** Yawn stop printed fabric

Large format Ichinisai Utawaga Kuniyoshi  
Later Period of Tenpo era (1838-1844)  
The Yamamotoya Heikichi Edition



**Figure 7:** Five Children and Ten Children

Large format Gokotei SadaKage  
Tenpo era (1830-1844)  
The Yamamotoya Heikichi Edition

The Edo period was a time when Japanese society was unified and stable, and the commodity economy was highly developed. Ukiyoe was born and popular among the people of this period, representing the secular and

popular aesthetic taste of the Eastern art world at that time (Ouyang, 2012). Ukiyoe, as an artistic text depicting the market life in the Edo period, has a wide range of subjects, mostly from the secular life and daily scenes of the people. What is particularly prominent is that its secular artistic characteristics are inseparable from its depiction of the body. When creating giga works, painters attach great importance to the depiction of human bodies. This depiction does not pay much attention to the true proportion of things, but emphasizes the inner feelings and psychological changes of the characters, using unique styles such as frankness and humor to express strong inner feelings. This artistic expression can also be seen as the Japanese game spirit - humorous on the surface and delicate and sincere on the inside.

#### 4. STACKING REFACTORION - THE PECULIAR "YOSEGA"

Yosega is a painting formed by piecing together multiple characters or objects. In addition, it is also known as "Strange Painting" due to its unique appearance. Utagawa Kuniyoshi's Yosega works attach great importance to the spatial composition of painting.

In his works, he puts the two-dimensional and three-dimensional spaces of painting in a contradictory state, thereby presenting the most vivid features of three-dimensional space with planarity. When people watch Utagawa Kuniyoshi's Yosega works, they can clearly feel the visual transformation of this spatial form.

Utagawa Kuniyoshi's "People Gather into Man" series works "Terrible in Appearance but a Great Person" (Figure 8) and "People Gather into Man" (Figure 9) are representative works of Yosega. The strange face in Figure 8 is composed of naked men, and the title is also humorous.

The hair of the character in the picture is a black clothed person holding a stick, with eyebrows covered in crotch fabric, lips covered in red crotch fabric, and the body is the back of Superman Asami Sanro. Inscription as follow: Many "people" gathered together and finally formed a "good person".

Only by using 'people' can one form a complete 'person'. The heads of the characters in Figure 9 are all composed of bare headed men. Its eyebrows and hair are all made of black crotch cloth, the small bun at the back of its head is a black hammer, and its body is also composed of several overlapping men.

The outstretched hand is composed of the hands and feet of the men.



Inscription as follow: There is no one among the people, an adult, a person of character.



**Figure 8:** Terrible appearance but a great person

Large format Ichinisai Utagawa Kuniyoshi  
From the fourth year of Koka era to the fifth year of Kaei era (1847-1852)  
The Fujioka-ya Hikotaro Edition



**Figure 9:** People Gathering as Adults

Large format Ichinisai Utagawa Kuniyoshi  
From the fourth year of Koka era to the fifth year of Kaei era (1847-1852)  
The Yamatoya Kyubei Edition

All visible objects (including the characters themselves) exist in three-dimensional space, but everything in three-dimensional presents two-dimensional characteristics.

In this series of works, Utagawa Kuniyoshi seeks the convergence of two-dimensional and three-dimensional forms through the transformation of flat and three-dimensional forms, the comparison of solid and virtual bodies, and the visual space. Through orderly and conscious stacking, his

paintings are enriched with rhythm and tend to be flat, creating a sense of spatial interest.

It can be said that Utagawa Kuniyoshi's Yosega works "present an inner vitality, emotion, soul, character, and spirit" (Zhu, 1979). From Utagawa Kuniyoshi's paintings, an important revelation can be drawn: the two-dimensional and three-dimensional spaces in images are difficult to separate. This concept has precisely become a symbol of artistic inclusiveness, as artists constantly cross the closed and conservative quagmire, exploring diversity, and creating new possibilities for artistic expression.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

To sum up, Utagawa Kuniyoshi's giga works fully reflect the alternative interpretation of entertainment spirit of Japanese people in the Edo period. His works focus on the relationship between the whole and the parts, organically linking various elements in the picture. Through delicate and clever composition techniques and meticulous handling of human form and spatial relationships, he creates stunning visual effects and artistic experiences.

In his works, the clever combination of text and graphics, the interesting expression of the body, and the visual transformation between flat and three-dimensional forms are all aimed at creating visual balance and flow in the picture, implying a subtle realm of "non reality" in reality. Utagawa Kuniyoshi's giga works not only showcase his outstanding artistic creativity and imagination, but also provide viewers with an engaging, diverse, and interesting visual experience.

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