

# Introduction

*Matedo kurasedo konu hito o*

Waiting and longing for the one who will not return

— TAKEHISA YUMEJI

**T**HE slow, sustained vibrato of a female operatic singer, her performance accompanied by the wistful music of a single violin, fills the exhibition space, which holds paintings, prints, illustrations, books, poetry, essays, and various commercial items by the modern Japanese artist Takehisa Yumeji (1884–1934). The lyrics of the song continue: “*Yoimachigusa no yarusenasa / koyoi wa tsuki mo denu sō na*” (The despair of the evening primrose / tonight it seems that even the moon will not appear), recounting the quiet longing and sorrow of unrequited love. Yumeji employed the image of the evening primrose as a metaphor for the yearning experienced by a lover who waits until late into the night for a paramour who never appears. The song “Yoimachigusa” (Evening primrose) was adapted from Yumeji’s poetry, which was published in 1912 in the magazine *Shōjo* (Girls). The violinist Ōno Tadasuke (1895–1929) set the lyrics to music, first performing the song in 1917. In the following year, Seno Music Publishers issued the musical score as part of its *Senō gakufu* (Seno music scores) with Yumeji’s design on the cover, showing a dainty female figure leaning against a tree, her eyes downcast (fig. I.1).<sup>1</sup> Hugely popular in the 1910s and 1920s, “Yoimachigusa” came to be associated with Yumeji’s name.<sup>2</sup> Even today exhibition spaces or museums displaying his work often play this iconic piece to conjure up a multisensory experience of the artist’s world.<sup>3</sup>

“Yoimachigusa” reveals the many aspects of Yumeji’s artistry, which include his multimedia production (poetry, song, and design), which proliferated in early twentieth-century Japanese culture. The song takes us back to a moment



**FIG. I.1.** Takehisa Yumeji, *Yoimachigusa* (Evening primrose), 1918. From *Senoō gakufu* (Senow music scores), no. 106. Lithograph, 31 x 22.7 cm. Kanazawa Yuwaku Yumeji-kan Museum.

in Japan's past, with Yumeji's images illustrating the era of the Taishō modern. Yet his images also accord with our own contemporary aesthetic. His images and designs still appear in Japanese popular culture, perhaps due to this sense of contemporaneity and familiarity. In Japan, his name and images are ubiquitous and recognizable on an array of commercial merchandise, clothing, and even buses and trains, which were decorated with Yumeji's images in 2014 in commemoration of the 130th anniversary of the artist's birth. Ordinary stationery stores throughout Japan sell items with images or design elements—a cute cat or botanical motifs—that Yumeji employed for the objects he sold at his Minatoya shop from 1914 to 1916. The Japanese casual-wear label Uniqlo launched a line of lightweight kimonos (*yukata*) for its 2007 summer season that were inspired by Yumeji's designs; Yumeji himself created clothing and kimono accessories, such as detachable collars (*haneri*) and *obi*. The self-fashioning and branding of the Yumeji name, the “Yumeji brand,” remains alive, sustained by Japanese consumers. Yumeji's popularity is likewise reflected in the number of museums dedicated to his work. There are six such institutions in Japan, an astonishing number compared to other artists of his generation and earlier.<sup>4</sup> Their existence provides further evidence of the ongoing appeal of Yumeji's art and the devotion of fans and collectors, whose holdings constitute the core of these institutions.<sup>5</sup>

Yumeji's enormous popularity afforded him a kind of celebrity status that was formed by a combination of his iconic images of beautiful women, known as *Yumeji-shiki bijin* (Yumeji-style beauties), which came to represent his artistry, and the scandalous rumors about Yumeji's romantic entanglements that he played on to shape his own image. What people understood about the artist fed into such perceptions, especially the intimate details of his private life, especially regarding his wife, Kishi Tamaki (1882–1945), who was believed to be the inspiration for the large eyes and beautiful features of Yumeji's female images; his passionate and tragic relationship with Kasai Hikono (1896–1920), who died from tuberculosis; and his cohabitation with his model Oyō (Sasaki Kaneyo, 1904–1980) in his self-designed house and studio, Shōnen Sansō (Boy's Mountain Lodge).<sup>6</sup> *Yoimachigusa* was much talked about as Yumeji's ode to a young woman he had met in 1910 during his travels on the Bōsō Peninsula, only to discover a year later that she had been married off. While such biographical accounts contribute to the picture of him as a melancholic, romantic, and self-taught artist—a view perpetuated even today—Yumeji perpetuated such perceptions, taking advantage of his “Yumeji” image. He was adept at programming his reception and was fully aware of the impact this had on his work and image. Take, for example, a posed photograph of the artist from 1910 (fig. I.2), which depicts him as intensely introspective, sitting on a windowsill, dressed in



**FIG. 1.2.** Takehisa Yumeji with mandolin at the Horiuchi house, 1910. Yumeji Art Museum, Okayama, Japan.

a full suit and looking slightly downward, his head tilted to the side. The composition is intended to convey the figure of the modern, cultured bohemian artist; the Italian mandolin in his lap, an exotic foreign instrument newly introduced to Japan in the early twentieth century, reinforces this. Yumeji was a master of self-fashioning, and even today we are drawn into his spell as we attempt to separate the interpretation of the artist and his work from the image he created, which was kept alive by his fans and consumers.

For the scholar, Takehisa Yumeji's art continues to pose unique challenges; his images are ubiquitous, even canonical, yet conspicuously absent from the official art historical discourse of modern Japanese art. His subject matter is frivolous and mundane, at once serious and profound. Both apolitical and political, he remained outside official art spheres, despite his influence. An artist of many contradictions who defies art historical definition, Yumeji occupied a different

space in Japanese visual and cultural history at a time when official definitions of art were being formed. In many ways his art offers a perfect lens through which to examine this particular moment in early twentieth-century Japanese art, one that coincided with the rise in new types of reprographic technology. Yumeji's prolific output of graphic works and his involvement in print culture and mass media are frequently treated in isolation and framed in ways that appear incompatible. It should be noted that his mass-media output—illustrations, cover designs, poetry, essays, and designs for free gift inserts—comprised contributions to more than 2,200 volumes of magazines, journals, and newspapers.<sup>7</sup> This book represents the first holistic study of Yumeji's artistry in its effort to unify the multiple discursive and social frameworks within which his images were animated with meaning and to analyze his role within the media environment of the late nineteenth to early twentieth century. This study therefore goes beyond the confines of a strictly art historical study and examines the multimedia production that complements his rich visual repertoire: texts, diary entries, poetry, essays, and illustrated books.

Yumeji's diverse modes of expression—visual, textual, and aural—appear as illustrations in literary, art, and music publications, paintings, poetry, novels, plays, translations, book designs, clothing, stage sets, shop merchandise, and advertisements, as well as commercial designs.<sup>8</sup> His work touched a broad audience, including young girls and boys to artists and authors, aspiring avant-garde artists, amateur art collectors, and even socialists and anarchists. Such a range of output and outreach would benefit from a further focused study in the larger context of the early twentieth-century Japanese mediascape that addresses the importance of materiality, technologies of dissemination, and styles of interaction, which mediated the communicated meaning and intent of Yumeji's art.<sup>9</sup>

It might be instructive here to discuss the terms *media* and *mediascape* as they are employed in this book. *Media* can describe the actual materials artists use to create their work and the range of final products that are produced by these different materials, such as painting, sculpture, prints, and illustrations. Another definition encompasses how these works are disseminated through different forms of communication. These are the very physical outlets in which audiences experience artworks, such as magazines, newspapers, and artists' books. Both definitions are important in the discussion of Yumeji because he produced works in various media that were widely circulated through diverse media outlets. The format of the outlet (i.e., media) was a key factor in the outcome of the artwork and how audiences consumed it. It is also a crucial mediator between the artist's expression and the audience's experience, which Yumeji

adeptly navigated and programmed, thus making the media itself an active agent in the creation and reception of his work.

*Mediascape* designates the larger environment of these media networks. Arjun Appadurai coined the term to explain the various dimensions of “global cultural flows” and to refer to modes of information distribution, such as magazines and newspapers, as well as the image or content that is being fashioned by the media.<sup>10</sup> It should be pointed out here that for Appadurai the suffix *-scape* denotes a kind of landscape of images existing within a construct that is dependent upon a specific perspective, one that shapes a kind of imagined world for its audience, extending beyond Benedict Anderson’s “imagined communities” and the fluidity of such a space in the media environment.<sup>11</sup>

The proliferation of Yumeji’s graphic works corresponded with a moment in Japan’s history encompassing the first two decades of the twentieth century, which witnessed an explosion of media when novel forms of reprographic media were forging new spaces for image dissemination. In the larger media context of the time, when photography and moving pictures were also being consumed, Yumeji’s graphic works, executed in a quick sketch-like manner to capture an almost hand-drawn quality, conveyed a direct connection to the artist’s hand. Yumeji’s characteristic use of simple contours, colors, and expression in his illustrations imbued the medium with accessibility and immediacy. Unlike the popular artistic idiom of *ukiyo-e* of the Edo period (1603–1868) and its dependence on the medium of the woodblock print, modern Japanese print culture from the later nineteenth century experimented with diverse reprographic techniques: lithography, collotype, offset printing, copperplate, wood engraving, photographic reproduction, and woodcuts.<sup>12</sup> This technological variety and the innovation that accompanied it formed a complex intersection between Yumeji’s art practice and the spaces for image-making generated by the expanding mediascape of the early 1900s, which included newspaper illustrations, coterie magazines, postcards, magazine and book frontispieces, posters, and advertisements. These media forms served as vehicles for the dissemination of imagery that could engage popular culture, from commercial design and advertising to radical political journalism and avant-garde expression. Yumeji was a key figure in these developments, and the artistic, social, and historical dimensions of this media transformation can be examined through his graphic work. He utilized the newly emerging media environment and the shifting status of the reproducible arts as a way to reach a mass audience on a scale and at a speed that were unprecedented in Japan. An interpretation of the mediascape reveals the formation of new audiences, most notably the emerging demographic of female consumers who in the early twentieth cen-

tury became the receptacles, creators, and vehicles of communal visual information. Yumeji shaped his own artistic persona into what might be seen as a kind of self-made media entrepreneur, and this lies at the heart of his eclectic spheres of production.<sup>13</sup>

## YUMEJI AND MODERN JAPANESE ART

The enduring legacy of Yumeji's art in Japan has been met with a corresponding lack of rigorous academic analysis. Until recently Yumeji's broad scope of production and later reception hindered his inclusion in the standard art historical narrative of modern Japanese art. Little scholarly attention has been paid to Yumeji's role in the early twentieth-century media environment, to the place of his female imagery as part of a shared visual experience for young female audiences, or to his involvement with younger artists with avant-garde leanings. In fact, it is only since the 1960s that art historians in Japan, and even later in the West, have turned their attention to Yumeji's work.<sup>14</sup> The Japanese scholar who has examined his oeuvre in depth within an art historical framework is Takahashi Ritsuko, who discussed the Yumeji-style beauty and the artist's *bijin* (beauties) as a social phenomenon.<sup>15</sup> Outside Japan, interest in Yumeji increased following the first exhibition devoted to his work, held in 2015 at the Nihon no hanga museum in Amsterdam.<sup>16</sup>

Yumeji's life and art are frequently dismissed for two reasons. First, the media's portrayal of him and his scandalous private life resulted in a trivialization of his work.<sup>17</sup> Second, as a self-taught artist, Yumeji was positioned outside academic art circles and prestigious government-sponsored exhibitions and awards. By comparison, contemporary illustrators and artists involved in graphic work generally had a degree of formal training in Nihonga (Japanese-style painting) or Yōga (Western-style painting).<sup>18</sup> Yumeji stood outside this orbit, and while a lack of official training and support excluded him from certain opportunities, this also permitted Yumeji artistic freedom, which did not go unnoticed by his contemporaries and his audience.

The Nihonga artist Nakazawa Reisen, for example, made an important observation on the occasion of Yumeji's first solo exhibition, held at the Kyoto Prefectural Library from November 23 to December 2, 1912. Reisen encapsulates the complexity surrounding Yumeji's multifaceted art practice, public reception, and popularity, as well as his position outside the official spheres of art production and exhibition. He even touches on Yumeji's proclivity for the lyrical (*jojō*) or sentimental. For Reisen, these qualities were paramount in understanding the artist:

In talking about Yumeji—in those days he had already published his collection of works [*Yumeji gashū*], and of course there were his illustrations in the daily socialist newspapers and his lyrical pictures [*jojō teki na e*] in various magazines. This corresponded with the height of his popularity. People have seen little of his work except for his illustrations [*sashi-e*], but when they saw the more than one hundred works, comprising oil paintings, small Nihonga paintings, watercolors, pen drawings, and so on at the exhibition they viewed them with both a sense of familiarity and awe. Day after day his exhibition was packed to full capacity. It was also rumored that Yumeji received more visitors than the Bunten. Moreover, he draped a black curtain in one room with the pen drawings, kept the light dim with candles, and even burned incense to appeal to the poetic sentiment and sense of life's inconsolable nature.<sup>19</sup>

Reisen is referring to the annual exhibition sponsored by the Ministry of Education, popularly known as the Bunten (Monbushō Bijutsu Tenrankai; Ministry of Education exhibition), which was roughly concurrent with Yumeji's exhibition and held at the nearby Kyoto Municipal Exhibition Hall for Industrial Affairs. Yumeji's choice of this venue was not coincidental.<sup>20</sup> It represented his stance against government-sponsored exhibitions and testified to the disparity between the spheres in which his work was viewed and official art circles and exhibitions. Reisen's astute observation reveals that even at this time there was a dilemma regarding how to position Yumeji and his oeuvre.

The mention of the Bunten is significant in grasping the larger art historical context of modern Japan, even though Yumeji occupied a different space, which operated alongside such modern art institutions and systems of art. How fine art (*bijutsu*) and other marginalized arts—that is, those of popular culture, such as commercial art or crafts—coexisted is a crucial component of the development of Japanese art from the end of the nineteenth to the early twentieth century, which lies at the heart of comprehending Yumeji and his art within the mediascape of this period. A study of an artist such as Yumeji is timely, since recent studies on the shaping of a modern Japanese art history have shifted from a focus on state policies, the impact of government sponsorship, and the national agenda to issues concerning popular culture, audience, reception, subjectivity, and materials.<sup>21</sup>

An analysis of the formulation and concept of the term *bijutsu* in modern Japan goes hand in hand with a discussion of the art policies that the Meiji state (1868–1912) put into place as a cultural expression of its nation-building

efforts.<sup>22</sup> The term *bijutsu* had been employed since Japan's participation in the 1873 Vienna World's Fair (Weltausstellung 1873 Wien), but it did not come into official use until the 1890s, with the founding of official art institutions such as the Tōkyō Bijutsu Gakkō (Tokyo School of Fine Arts) and the Teikoku Hakubutsukan (Imperial Museum) in 1889.<sup>23</sup> The founding of the annual Bunten in 1907 also marks a watershed moment when the term *bijutsu*, now absorbed into the language of the Bunten system, came to designate painting and sculpture, distinguishing them as fine arts within the broader category of *geijutsu*, which included both crafts and decorative arts.<sup>24</sup> The categorization of the fine arts within the Bunten immediately pushed crafts and reproducible arts such as prints into a marginalized category that was not *bijutsu*, and this distinction validated the concept of *bijutsu* and what it represented in national and societal spheres.<sup>25</sup>

An understanding of the issues of audience and reception, together with the spheres beyond *bijutsu*, is key to the study of Yumeji and his art practice.<sup>26</sup> These marginalized groups of creators (or illustrators), often associated with mass media, were operating outside, but parallel with, the realm of *bijutsu*. In this way they nurtured an audience that extended to include the wider public (*taishū*), instead of solely the viewing public (*kanshū*), which participated in visiting and experiencing museums and exhibitions. The shift in experiencing artwork from an official venue (museum/exhibitions) to a public one (mass media) delineates the modern era, which expanded the site of artistic expression to encompass amateur artists such as Yumeji, bringing them closer to the professional world and constructing an ideal environment for the genesis of a new space of art appreciation. Yumeji's graphic work and its dissemination in various media forms can be seen as occupying these alternate spaces for art-making.

## THE YUMEJI STYLE

In his role as a media entrepreneur, Yumeji navigated the complex, ever-evolving milieu characterizing the technologically diverse reprographic media of the era. His works proliferated in mass media and became a recognizable brand associated with the Yumeji name. His success and popularity has been closely tied to the notion of the *Yumeji-shiki*, or "Yumeji style," which is the focus of chapter 1. This term can be understood as a reference to specific pictorial traits associated with Yumeji's *bijinga*, but in its broader definition it also projects a female type that embodies and expresses Yumeji-like qualities and inhabits a sphere independent of Yumeji's artwork. As noted above, Takahashi Ritsuko argues that

the *Yumeji-shiki* in fact constitutes a “social phenomenon” (*shakai genshō*) in its use both within and beyond his art.<sup>27</sup> This study expands upon Takahashi’s interpretation by considering the concept of the *Yumeji-shiki* as an integral part of Yumeji’s self-fashioned brand, which he enlisted to mediate the reception of his art, particularly in mass media.

It should also be pointed out that much of the discussion surrounding the *Yumeji-shiki* deals with women both as subject matter and as audience. Yumeji’s *bijinga* quickly became a recognizable type, sought after and idolized by many women and girls. As such, his female images require (re)evaluation within the larger context of the Taishō period (1912–26), when emerging female types in Japanese society such as the *atarashii onna* (New Woman) and the *modan gaaru* (Modern Girl) became objects of discourse and visual representation. In addition, the rising push for democratic reform with the Jiyū Minken Undō (Popular Rights Movement) in the 1880s and feminist movements by socialist women in the early twentieth century, including efforts by the iconic feminist Hiratsuka Raichō (1886–1971) and the Seitōsha (Blue Stockings Society) from around 1912 to 1913, provide a larger context to these discussions.<sup>28</sup> Therein, Yumeji’s *bijinga* provided an entry point for his female consumers to project their own identities onto images of ordinary girls, who were given central focus and attention in his work.<sup>29</sup> This fostered a feeling of the community of girlhood or a “girlhood identity,” as described by Sarah Frederick in her discussion of *shōjo* identities.<sup>30</sup> Girls were avid consumers of the *Yumeji-shiki* brand; however, this does not mean that Yumeji’s *bijin* images were themselves a direct response or representation of actual female types. On the contrary, Yumeji’s beauties engendered an illusion that conflated the real and the ideal; as the artist, he intentionally kept these distinctions vague to fuel a sense of the familiar *and* the mysterious.

One of Yumeji’s most iconic *bijinga* images, the 1919 painting *Kurofuneya* (Black ship shop; fig. I.3), does just that by conveying both the attainable female type and the unattainable female ideal. The painting exhibits characteristics associated with the *Yumeji-shiki* *bijin*, which would have been immediately identifiable by a contemporary audience and even for us today in its single-figure composition, dainty pose, and vacant, melancholic facial expression. It was the depicted figure and what audiences projected onto that image that resulted in the broad definition of the *Yumeji-shiki*.

The ubiquitous nature and expansive quality of the Yumeji style and brand enabled the artist to open his own shop, commonly known as the Minatoya or Harbor Shop, which sold his illustrations, prints, and designed objects. Yumeji’s multimedia and commercial production, predicated on the Yumeji brand, speaks to the concept of media mix, a term often associated with the



**FIG. 1.3.** Takehisa Yumeji, *Kurofuneya* (Black ship shop), 1919. Color on silk, 130 x 50.6 cm. Takehisa Yumeji Ikaho Museum.

description of the much later phenomenon of the late 1980s Japanese media convergence and the cross-media dissemination of entertainment merchandise particularly associated with anime characters.<sup>31</sup> Although here the context and period are different, the concept of character merchandising—in essence a relationship between an image or brand and its commoditization across multiple media platforms—is instructive when interpreting Yumeji’s pioneering endeavors in branding his objects. By the early twentieth century, Yumeji was already involved in a type of intermedia branding. This book aims to contribute to the field of media studies and to art history and visual culture, targeting a broad range of specialists and students interested in popular culture, design history, graphic design, and consumer culture.<sup>32</sup>

## THE SOCIALIST PLATFORM

While the popularity of the *Yumeji-shiki* centered around the female figure, Yumeji’s focus on the anonymous girl, her subjectivity and experiences, developed alongside his own political stance and interest in the common people. A significant impetus for his artistic career in fact began with illustrations in socialist publications. Chapter 2 examines the relationship among his illustrations, socialist bulletins, and mass media, which laid the groundwork for Yumeji as he developed his subject matter and audience in his early career. Broadly circulating publications played a key role in Yumeji’s production and the reception of his work by a wider audience. His creative visual language, his skill in navigating the specific media or platform that featured his illustrations, and his ability to empathize with the subjects he portrayed and their interests made Yumeji a successful media entrepreneur.



**FIG. I.4.** Takehisa Yumeji, *Shōri no hiai* (The sorrows of victory). From *Chokugen*, vol. 2, no. 20, June 18, 1905. (left) Complete newspaper page and (right) detail. Original woodcut reproduced mechanically for newspaper publication (zinc plate relief printing), 37.6 x 26.6 cm. Seal: 酒 (most likely read *Asami*). Image taken from Harvard-Yenching Library collection.

Yumeji's involvement in a variety of publication types also facilitated the evolution of a multifarious artistic expression, especially as it relates to his more political illustrations.

Examples such as *Shōri no hiai* (The sorrows of victory; fig. I.4), published in the socialist bulletin *Chokugen* (Plain speaking), convey Yumeji's underlying socialist ideology and personal affinity with those who lost loved ones in war.<sup>33</sup> Illustrations produced for the socialist publisher Heiminsha reveal Yumeji's intense involvement with the socialist movement during the period of the Russo-Japanese War (February 1904–September 1905) and up to the 1911 *Taiyaku Jiken* (High Treason Incident), when a number of socialists were falsely accused, imprisoned, and executed. Yumeji's illustrations in these publications demonstrate his strong antiwar stance and his identification with the day-to-

day lives of the average citizen. They display a more serious, political side of the artist still little discussed by scholars, and his engagement with socialist publications underscores the significance of this outlet as a basis for Yumeji's success in mass media. Issues of materiality and systems of circulation are further examined with the proliferation of Yumeji's images at this time, marking the beginning of his alliance with ordinary people and his influence in the creation of a shared visual culture.

## YUMEJI AND MASS MEDIA

The increased exposure of Yumeji's work in mass media led to a proliferation of his illustrations in a wide range of magazines and a greater involvement in design. Chapter 3 focuses on the widening circulation and the increased visibility that elevated Yumeji to a kind of celebrity status; it also touches upon his involvement in discussions during this period regarding the status and role of illustrations in visual culture and arts. Through Yumeji's own writings and those by other leading illustrators of the early twentieth century, such as Kimura Sōhachi (1893–1958), the reevaluation of the medium of illustration as a viable art form became an important point of discussion. In an effort to address the ephemeral nature of illustrations and to elevate their status, in 1909 Yumeji published his first anthology of illustrations, poetry, and prose, *Yumeji gashū: Haru no maki* (Yumeji collection of works: Spring volume; fig. I.5). This set was a compilation of his numerous illustrations that had previously appeared in mass-circulation publications. Assembling these works in the format of an art book (*gashū*) created a more permanent status and also served to transform their purpose.

The magazines featuring Yumeji's illustrations and the audiences that consumed them were key to Yumeji and the reception of his art. His images of women, either as illustrations or cover designs, were especially successful in publications targeting a young female audience. These images invited readers to become both the subjects and viewers of the illustrated beauties and to partake in the visual experience. Female imagery in women's magazines became a site for discussions of the modern through the representation of a modern lifestyle, consumer society, and mass culture. Representations of Yumeji-style beauties engaged these audiences in a way that Frederick describes as women's magazines creating both a consciousness for women as an audience as well as public awareness of a new gender category.<sup>34</sup> The connection of mass culture with the feminine is also problematic, however, as both were immediately positioned outside the official realm of high culture, points that are also addressed by scholars



**FIG. I.5.** Title page of Takehisa Yumeji, *Yumeji gashū: Haru no maki* (Yumeji collection of works: Spring volume) (Tokyo: Rakuyōdō, 1909). Yumeji Art Museum, Okayama, Japan.

such as Andreas Huyssen and Rita Felski.<sup>35</sup> The use of the female image in mass culture was a limiting factor excluding such subjects from official arenas of high art, even though the openness and public realm typifying its existence did allow for audience participation.

Yumeji's magazine covers and illustrations cultivated a new demographic of female readership that reflected the larger literary context and the development of magazines and popular fiction during the Taishō period as well as increasing education of women in modern Japan. Magazines geared toward a female readership, in which Yumeji's illustrations circulated, signal active participation by their readers. This in turn shaped their creation. The letters and essay contributions by young female readers were an element of the authoring process, the nature of the publication, and its quality of reproducibility, which undeniably cultivated this type of public participation. The idea of a collective visual experience through reproducible media is apparent in the reader involvement/submission process of these publications and is in line with the subject matter and audience examined in chapter 2, which relates to Yumeji's socialist illustrations.

## THE YUMEJI SCHOOL AND TSUKUHAE ARTISTS

Yumeji's involvement in mass media and commercial spheres placed him outside the newly established circles of the art academy and the realm of fine arts. Yumeji instead fashioned his own alternative space as an outlier. This space was one of many that emerged as the result of the categories of fine arts promulgated by official art academies and government-sponsored exhibitions, which relegated other forms of production and artistic engagement to a kind of alternative orbit. Yumeji not only operated within these complex outside spaces but created his own subsphere of influence as a kind of salon-like place and exhibition venue at his studio and his Minatoya shop, where like-minded artists and authors could gather. It soon became a nexus for Tokyo's avant-garde artists and writers, who looked for inspiration beyond the official art realms. Chapter 4 gives special attention to this space. Young artists saw Yumeji as a mentoring figure and convened in his studio, which they called the *Yumeji gakkō* (Yumeji school), an appellation that is somewhat ironic considering that Yumeji was a self-taught artist and many of these young artists were in fact students of the prestigious Tokyo School of Fine Arts. The most influential of these associations were with Onchi Kōshirō (1891–1955), Tanaka Kyōkichi (1892–1915), and Fujimori Shizuo (1891–1943), three aspiring artists who went on to form the art and literary group Tsukuhae (Reflections of the Moon). They were eager to



FIG. 1.6. Takehisa Yumeji, *Uramaji kimi o ba* (Ich grolle nicht), 1925. From *Senow gakufu* (Senow music scores), no. 384, composed by Robert Schumann. Nihon no hanga Collection, Amsterdam.

explore different avenues of artistic expression, including contemporary Western styles such as Cubism, Futurism, and Expressionism, which also impacted Yumeji's work.<sup>36</sup> Yumeji's eclectic artistic interests particularly influenced these artists, who together perused foreign and domestic coterie magazines at Yumeji's studio, which were instrumental in introducing them to new Western artistic trends. Yumeji's success in publishing his own collection of works and his engagement with graphic works in mass media encouraged Tsukuhæ artists to espouse the woodcut as their creative medium and was key in securing an outlet for the publication of their coterie magazine *Tsukuhæ*.

Yumeji's connection with such artists engages an aspect of Yumeji's art practice that to date has received little attention. His influence on younger artists working in a more avant-garde visual mode may seem unexpected, but it is nonetheless emblematic, to an extent, of the chaotic, eclectic nature of artistic influence and expression characterizing early twentieth-century Japanese art and the alternate space that Yumeji occupied and provided for these artists. And in mediating an alternative sphere outside the official definition of the fine arts, Yumeji's involvement with these artists reveals an aspect of his artistic style that embraced Western avant-garde trends. This included, most notably, certain design and figural elements Onchi developed in his woodcuts for *Tsukuhæ* magazine. These had a profound impact on Yumeji's work, as seen, for example, in the cover design for *Senow Music Scores* for Robert Schumann's song, "Uramaji kimi o ba" ("Ich grolle nicht"; fig. I.6), which adopts the highly abstract single-eye motif and use of sharp diagonals seen in Onchi's prints and demonstrates the range of visual styles that Yumeji brought into his visual lexicon.

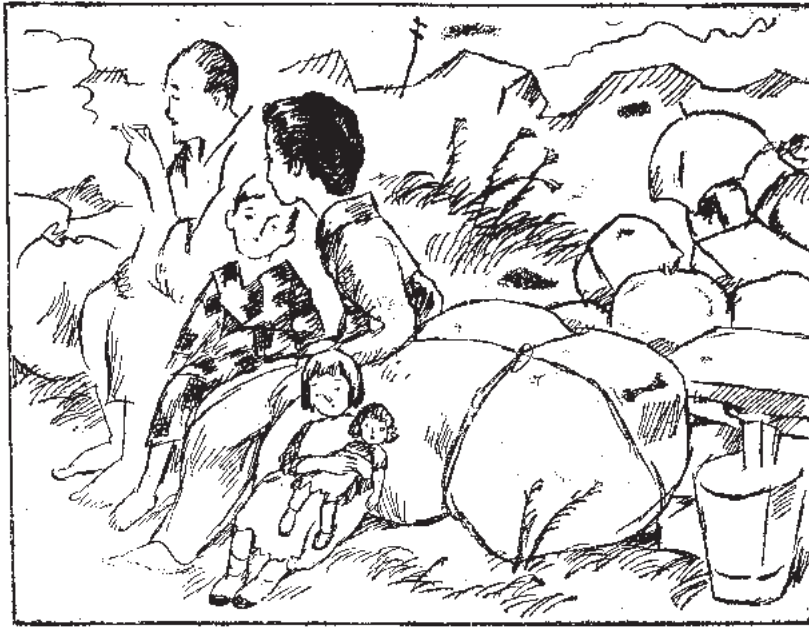
## SKETCHES OF THE TOKYO DISASTER

The final chapter revisits the artist Yumeji as a contradictory figure, not only in terms of the eclectic and at times disparate influences that coexist in his art practice but also in his subject matter and political stance. It is unquestionable that the popularity of the *Yumeji-shiki bijin* fueled Yumeji's reception, both during his lifetime and today. Yet his compassion and close observation of the day-to-day activities of ordinary women, men, and children provide a common thread that had surfaced early in his career with his socialist illustrations. In essence, this approach informed his female figures, giving voice to the voiceless in society by refocusing people's attention away from government officials and restoration policies.

Some eighteen years after his first socialist illustrations, Yumeji's political stance against the Japanese government and his alignment with the common

東京災難畫信

竹久夢二



見まじきもの  
 十四  
 知らぬ人、何と云ひ解  
 くらぬを知らない。  
 申すは、東京全壊と聞いて、  
 立派の西郷に集つて、海軍艦  
 から船で、避難すべくと  
 一晩に押してあるのを見て、  
 船が全壊しては、船中の者  
 も生きてはゐないだらう。涙  
 ぐんを流して身ると、目撃者  
 氣な船は、焼付されはした  
 が、自分の船と貯蓄船だけ  
 残つて残存へ歸つてゐた。赤  
 たきり船になつた人々は、そ  
 れでもやうと叫ぶのだ。そ  
 れに、お前が生きてゐて  
 好かつたよ。  
 そんなに心の底まで身合せ  
 つても、生活はすぐにやせ合  
 つかせらるだらう。

FIG. 1.7 Takehisa Yumeji, *Mimajiki mono* (No. 14, Things that should not have been seen). From *Tōkyō sainan gashin* (Sketches of the Tokyo disaster), *Miyako shinbun*, September 27, 1923. Mechanical reproduction from original woodcut. Image taken from Takehisa Minami, ed., *Takehisa Yumeji “Tokyo shinsai gashin” ten shū* (Tokyo: Gyarari Yumeji, 2011).

people take concrete form in his reaction to the Great Kantō Earthquake of September 1, 1923. His *Tōkyō sainan gashin* (Sketches of the Tokyo disaster), released thirteen days after the earthquake, demonstrates Yumeji’s camaraderie with his fellow Tokyoites and the struggles that the survivors faced as the city, region, and nation attempted to come to terms with and recover from the event. The fourteenth illustration of the set, *Mimajiki mono* (No. 14—Things that should not have been seen; fig. I.7), for example, shows Yumeji’s sympathetic gaze in his depiction of a mother with her son and daughter waiting helplessly among the wreckage while a man, clearly dazed, smokes a cigarette behind them.

This set of twenty-one sketches and accompanying texts was published over twenty-one days in the *Miyako* newspaper. In addition to its focus on the experience of the ordinary people, this set reflects Yumeji’s critical view of how the Japanese government dealt with the disaster and his awareness of the government’s

increasingly oppressive political and military stance. *Sketches of the Tokyo Disaster* marks the endpoint of the first phase of Yumeji's career, when he was exploring his own individual expression, and his work in mass media was most prolific. A number of divergent aspects coalesce in this work: a representation of his political side, his more light-hearted female imagery, and his interest in ordinary people and their relationships, in particular, the bond between mother and child. There is a maturation in Yumeji's visual expression and in his role as media entrepreneur, and the almost hand-drawn quality in his illustrations offers a direct link to the artist's emotional journey. The platform of the newspaper, especially of the *Miyako shinbun*, which was known for its entertainment value, further encapsulates the contradictions of his political and apolitical, frivolous and serious nature, and yet brings these threads together in a way that highlights this particular moment in the early twentieth-century Japanese mediascape.

## **YUMEJI THEN AND NOW**

Yumeji's graphic work and his engagement with mass media provide a lens into the complexity of the media environment of modern Japan. The epilogue examines the latter part of Yumeji's artistic career and his continuing legacy. In 1931, Yumeji realized his lifelong dream of traveling abroad when he spent time in America and Europe. Unfortunately, the strain of this trip was a contributing factor to his death in 1934 at the age of fifty; however, his premature death further boosted his reception as the melancholic artist whose aspirations were never fully realized. Much of what we experience regarding Yumeji's image in contemporary Japan has been impacted by his compilations of popular female images and what best suited the romantic perception of the artist.

Yumeji's ongoing legacy and his cult-like following today are a testament to his name branding and his acumen as a media entrepreneur. They further speak to the broader implications of his work through the integration of art and commercial spheres as well as the place of the print medium in modern Japanese art and visual culture. An understanding of his legacy and his role within the mediascape of the early twentieth century contributes to how we view a widely circulating media outlet that links with the multiple modes of communication and viewing experience.



## The Modern Beauty and the Yumeji Style

**Y**UMEJI'S popularity has been closely tied to his production of *bijinga*, which quickly became a much sought-after and idolized type. While the artist's images of beauties have been the subject of most attention, perhaps to the exclusion of an analysis of his other work, they are an important point of entry in understanding Yumeji's visibility and success in curating his artistic profile and the Yumeji brand. His success in mass media publications and his cultivation of a new demographic of female readership were integral to the creation of the Yumeji-style beauty. While particular visual characteristics of *bijin* imagery are frequently associated with the Yumeji style, the term came to encompass much more than the figures in his work. The broader, more conceptual definition of the term indicates the influence Yumeji and his oeuvre had beyond the boundaries of visual culture and the arts, encompassing social, cultural, and even political dimensions. Analysis of the impact of his *bijinga* is crucial, as it informs the foundations of Yumeji's other types of production as well as the development of interconnectivity across media in the modern era, both domestically and globally.

### THE MAKING OF THE YUMEJI STYLE

The first occurrence of the term *Yumeji-shiki* was in 1907 in the editorial section of the newspaper *Yomiuri shinbun*, which was reporting on Yumeji's return from a trip through Chiba Prefecture. The newspaper had hired Yumeji that year and sent him to the Bōsō Peninsula with the brief to write a serialized travelogue in nineteen short installments with his own illustrations.<sup>1</sup> The editor records, "Mr. Takehisa returned to the company from his travels carrying

a large string-drawn cloth bag [*shingen-bukuro*] shaped in an unusual Yumeji style [*Yumeji-shiki*]. It was full of sketching tools.”<sup>2</sup>

Although the expression here relates to Yumeji’s cloth bag, it would later enter the vernacular of urban culture, mainly among his female audience, as a reference to the artist’s representation of the female form. This gave rise to the description of his women as *Yumeji-shiki bijin*, or “Yumeji-style beauties,” which prevailed among his clientele. Its impact on the overall reception of his oeuvre provides insights into his place as an early twentieth-century artist.

The expression *Yumeji-shiki* became so pervasive in a cultural context that it merited inclusion in the *Kōjien*, considered one of the most authoritative dictionaries of the Japanese language. The definition reads, “Term derived from works by Takehisa Yumeji. The manner in which images of beauties [*bijinga*] are depicted with long eyelashes, large eyes, and a delicate but melancholic expression.”<sup>3</sup>

The notion of a Yumeji style therefore went beyond a pictorial description to assume a wider societal role in delineating a real female type. Takahashi has analyzed the artist’s *bijin* as a “social phenomenon” (*shakai genshō*) and states that the term *Yumeji-shiki* had three meanings: 1) women in Yumeji’s graphic works; 2) actual modern women of early twentieth-century Japan; and 3) individuals who consume the Yumeji brand and its commodities.<sup>4</sup> The capacity of the term *Yumeji-shiki* to embrace both visual traits and a conceptual type is certainly a social phenomenon. Here I would like to build upon Takahashi’s analysis and further consider the use and proliferation of the concept of the Yumeji style as part of the artist’s self-fashioning as he mediated his reception, particularly in mass media. It is also my intention to treat media as an active agent that animated and produced new meanings as Yumeji’s works were mediated through specific media platforms, creating a novel relationship between his work and the viewer.

One example of the mention of the *Yumeji-shiki* outside his artwork is an account written around 1911 by the doctor who attended Yumeji on his deathbed at the Fujimi Highlands Sanatorium. He described an episode involving his younger sister:

At the commemoration festival of the First High School, there was a strict policy against women on campus. . . . [T]he over sixty-year-old laundry lady was an exception, of course. . . . [A]nd at this high school, which had strict rules, there was a student in the south dormitory who would peer out of his second-floor window and whisper, “Hey, there goes a Yumeji-style girl.”

In fact, during those days, it was said that only a sparrow or bird would not be attracted to the kind of woman depicted in Yumeji's work. The schoolgirls would all prance about trying to be "Yumeji-style beauties." My younger sister, who will be close to forty this year, came back from school in Takebaya-chō at that time and would say, delighted, "Brother, someone just called me a 'Yumeji-style beauty' on the street."<sup>5</sup>

Many similar accounts are documented from the early 1900s that provide a glimpse into how these Yumeji-style beauties might look on the streets of Tokyo and even across the nation. Yumeji's distinct, individualistic interpretation of the female form gave tangibility to the image of the *Yumeji-shiki bijin* that young women aspired to.

But what actually constituted the Yumeji style? In 1936, two years after Yumeji's death, the essayist and raconteur Tokugawa Musei (1894–1971) made an observation about the artist's signature female image that gels with the much later *Kōjien* definition above:

The eyes were a dominant trait of a Yumeji-style [*Yumeji-shiki*] woman [*onna*]*—*all the eyes had black pupils, all black, and a beauty with long eyelashes.

"Oh, she has the eyes of a Yumeji-style woman" [*ano onna wa Yumeji shiki no me o shite iru*] even became a popular catch phrase. From then on we all preferred slender figures to the robust body types of women today.<sup>6</sup>

Musei singled out the eyes as a defining characteristic of Yumeji's women, but already during the artist's lifetime this facial feature evolved as a hallmark of the Yumeji-style beauty. This is intimated as early as January 24, 1907, in an announcement in the socialist newspaper *Nikkan Heimin shinbun* (Daily commoner's newspaper) regarding Yumeji's marriage to Kishi Tamaki (1882–1945):

MR. TAKEHISA YUMEJI'S MARRIAGE

He will be married to a most beautiful woman with large eyes.<sup>7</sup>

The *Heimin shinbun* article goes on to mention how the goddess of love, Venus, felt sorry for Yumeji and had finally given him the beauty with large eyes that he had portrayed in his works. They were married in Ushigome in Tokyo, and the article explains that the reason why the eyes of Yumeji's beauties became even larger in his images following his marriage was because they were modeled

after Tamaki. Here again, we witness how the characteristics of his depicted *bijin* were interwoven with the artist's biography and image.

One work emblematic of the evolving Yumeji style is the 1919 painting *Kurofuneya* (Black ship shop; see fig. I.3). An iconic image immediately recognizable as a *Yumeji-shiki bijin*, this painting features a single figure occupying the central visual space and set against minimal background detail. *Kurofuneya* presents aspects of Yumeji's later production of *bijinga* up to the mid-1920s, when his figures were further delineated by a more ovoid face, tapered chin, slightly higher nose bridge, wider eyes, and a larger lower lip. The seated beauty appears in three-quarter view, her face tilted downward and her slim torso accentuated by her long neck and narrow shoulders. The areas of flesh, including the face, neckline, hands, and feet, are painted in a bright white pigment with a matte finish, adding a physical and emotional weight to the surface. Her hair is swept up into a high curled chignon decorated by two gold hair ornaments, further accentuating the painting's vertical composition and imbuing the woman with a somewhat old-fashioned Edo-period look. Her posture is bent, and she wears a striking silk kimono, the vibrant yellow of which overlays black and red stripes articulated through bold black brushstrokes and thinner red brushstrokes that curve around her body.<sup>8</sup>

The most distinctive element of this painting is the large black cat, rendered using a flat application of pigment, whose form shields most of the beauty's upper torso. Its pointy ears obstruct the outline of her face, its outstretched right leg echoes the curve of her shoulder, and its long tail coils across the slope of her knee and upper shins. Yumeji seems to have been particularly drawn to the subject of the woman holding a black cat, as it would become a recurring theme in later works. It also demonstrates the eclectic sources of imagery and inspiration that Yumeji drew upon for this work. The placement of the black cat and the embracing gesture of the woman resemble the 1908 painting *Woman with Cat* by the Dutch artist Kees van Dongen (1877–1968) (fig. 1.1), which was first seen in Japan in a reproduction in the September 1917 issue of the art journal *Bijutsu* (Art). A small reproduction of this painting is known from Yumeji's scrapbook (see Takashina Shūji's "Yumeji no sukurappu bukku"). Van Dongen's painting shows the female figure from the waist up, while Yumeji's painting depicts the woman in full length, seated on a red box that anchors the composition.

Yumeji reappropriates Van Dongen's composition, adding his own culturally specific visual elements such as the kimono and the red box, and this offers a point of access for the Japanese viewer. He employed the same representation for the cover design of the magazine *Surimono: Hana no maki* (Printed things:



**FIG. 1.1.** Kees van Dongen. *Woman with Cat*, 1908. Oil on canvas, 91.76 x 73.66 cm. Milwaukee Art Museum.

Flower volume; fig. 1.2) and for prints (fig. 1.3), with variations in the color of the woman's kimono.<sup>9</sup> Kawase Chihiro suggests that the novel *Kuroneko* (Black cat) by the contemporary writer Izumi Kyōka (1873–1939) may have also served as a literary influence on Yumeji's painting.<sup>10</sup> Izumi Kyōka's novel recounts the especially close relationship between the female protagonist and her corpulent black cat. It is important to note that Yumeji draws from both Western artistic influences as well as Japanese literary sources.

The facial features of Yumeji's *bijin* shed light on how these beauties become a later subject of discussion beyond the visual image. In this regard, the woman in *Kurofuneya* is representative of Yumeji's *bijin*: a long oval face, low nose bridge with a small round tip, pursed lips, wide-set eyes with accentuated upper and lower lashes, matt black pupils often placed at the corner of the eyes as if they are unfocused or looking beyond the picture plane, and wide-set eyebrows that are slightly downturned. The woman's expression is vacant, her undirected gaze conjuring up a sense of contemplative stupor. Her bent shoulders and languid limbs communicate a demure, passive quality. These same characteristics also suggest a kind of self-absorption that serves to detach the figure from the direct

gaze of the viewer. The difficulty in reading the woman's ambiguous expression, which intimates a complex, layered psychological interiority, might have engaged a female readership. In effect, it turns the figure into a vehicle for subjectivity and allows visual and conceptual discussions of modernization to be projected onto her image. This quality invited contemporary viewers, especially but not exclusively female, to project their own identities and even situate themselves within the broader cultural climate of the Taishō period.

Yumeji's much publicized amorous affairs with several women added grist for the media mill, and it was inevitable that this would impact the perception and reception of his work. This is especially relevant with his *bijinga*, which are frequently discussed as portraying a specific individual, be it Tamaki or another woman with whom he was involved romantically. The subtle variations in physical features are often attributed to Yumeji's three main lovers—Kishi Tamaki, Kasai Hikono, and Sasaki Kaneyo (Oyō; 1904–80)—and have contributed to the formulation of an overarching characterology of Yumeji's



**FIG. 1.2.** Takehisa Yumeji, *Kuroneko o daku onna* (Woman holding a black cat), 1920. Cover for the magazine *Surimono: Hana no maki* (Printed things: Flower volume), Seibundō catalog. Color woodcut. Kanazawa Yuwaku Yumeji-kan Museum.

*bijinga* alongside his scandalous reputation as a ladies' man. Yumeji's *bijin* go beyond his biographical narrative, however, to create a visual and conceptual identity that assumed a life of its own as the Yumeji style. Yumeji utilized such rumors and interest in his personal romantic life as yet another layer to his self-fashioned identity. He maintained that his "lovers were not 'Yumeji-style beauties' . . . [and that] there were many so-called Yumeji-style beauties that lived and walked the streets in those days but [he] did not model [his] beauties on a particular woman. Rather, these beauties were the product of [his] own fantasy."<sup>11</sup>

Nonetheless, the belief (or illusion) that these women were grounded in actuality enchanted Yumeji's audience. The existence of a *Yumeji-shiki* woman offered a sense of affinity that his contemporary viewers could project onto women of their own era. It could be conjectured that Yumeji's understanding of this effect may have led him to position his source of inspiration as an ideal rather than a real person. This would have further perpetuated the syncopation between an



**FIG. 1.3.** Takehisa Yumeji, *Kuroneko o daku onna* (Woman holding a black cat), 1920s. Color woodcut. Sold by Yanagiya. Kanazawa Yuwaku Yumeji-kan Museum.

attainable true-life existence and an idealized figure. Rather than the portrayals of women in flapper-style dresses and bobbed haircuts that were part of the ubiquitous imagery of modern girls at this time, Yumeji's beauties often don traditional kimono with accents of modernity, and even when depicted in up-to-date Western clothing, their demeanor is still demure. This may have made the images more accessible to the average Japanese woman, who could perhaps imagine herself and close female friends or acquaintances as Yumeji-style beauties. An account by the celebrated poet and novelist Murō Saisei (1889–1962) described Yumeji's popularity and the expression of the “now” and “the modern” through his *bijin*:

At the time, Takehisa Yumeji was already a big name. It was said that after seeing his images, all the young girls would be unable to resist and would immediately fall in love with them. There were rumors that Yumeji had more than a dozen lovers, and his popularity was such that you could not deny that such rumors might actually be true. The large pupils of the Yumeji-style beauty even mesmerized men. Young girls must have felt as though they were melting inside when they encountered them. A bit vexed, I would swear at my friends, calling Yumeji's images mere erotic prints [*shunga*]—just erotic prints with clothes on them, I would say. However, for some reason the young girls started to adopt the facial types of Yumeji's beauties. The lingering flames from the end of the Meiji period suddenly took a different turn and the eyes of young women were opened widely, their faces made ready for a new stage. They began to dream. With eyes shining like fireflies, these young girls ushered in a new song of revolution in the history of Japanese girls. These girls became the link to the new modern types of women, such as *Kurara Bo* and *modan gaaru*. Such girls, with the skin and face of the beauties depicted by Yumeji, are alternative forms of the Yumeji-style beauty that became so popular.<sup>12</sup>

Murō goes as far as to credit Yumeji's *bijin* imagery with inspiring new waves of female self-expression, and terms such as *Yumeji-shiki bijin*, *Kurara Bo*, and *modan gaaru* are a few examples of the polyphony of emerging social types employed to describe women of the early twentieth century. Although the exact number of Yumeji's female fans is not known, numerous contemporary accounts like the above convey people's impressions that Yumeji had a large female following. Moreover, they demonstrate how integral the Yumeji image was in discussions of the identity of modern Japanese women at this time.

## MODERN JAPANESE WOMEN AND THEIR REPRESENTATION

By the Taishō period, the lexicon of the modern woman included terms such as *jogakusei* (female student), *shufu* (housewife), and *jokyū* (café waitress) in addition to the better-known *New Woman* and *Modern Girl*. These terms were neither clearly defined nor mutually exclusive. Instead, they were basic categorizations that grew out of the activities, social spaces, and employment now open to modern Japanese women. The female body—in image and in concept—thus became the primary locus around which discussions of modernization took place.<sup>13</sup> The early years of the Taishō period witnessed a slow climb in the number of working women, particularly in the cities, a phenomenon that stemmed from “economic necessity, awakened women’s consciousness, and job availability.”<sup>14</sup>

These new types of women not only were present in pictorial form but also comprised a constituency for these images that in turn shaped their production. Within this socially and culturally shifting role of women and their image, Yumeji’s *bijin* were at once a reaction to and a catalyst in the formulation of these “bodies” of the modern Japanese woman. This is not to say, however, that these constructs of female types should be appropriated directly in an examination of Yumeji’s *bijinga*. It is important to clarify that Yumeji’s beauties cannot be explained simply as a one-to-one correlation between the emerging female types and the process of modernization that influenced Yumeji and the consumers of his art. While the Modern Girl imagery in media can be seen as part of a larger global phenomenon, Yumeji’s immediate context of modern Japan illuminates its specific localized effect.

Yumeji’s *bijin* resonated with the female audiences of his time, but these images also attracted criticism for exactly the opposite reason—that is, that they did not reflect the real Japanese woman. The author Akita Ujaku (1883–1962) comments, “During his early career, Yumeji continued to depict the day-to-day circumstances of women and children with those almost sickly weak lines. These works are surely great achievements but I think that they do not convey the vitality and vigor of that period at all—I believe that these aspects need to be critically assessed” (see appendix 1).<sup>15</sup>

It is noteworthy that such a discussion was occurring at this time, revealing the very essence of the familiarity and the accessibility of Yumeji’s *bijin*, which spoke directly to many in his audience. At the same time, it discloses the complex nature and awareness that the modern Japanese woman could not be encapsulated by any single (visual) type. Yumeji was not averse to the projected modern quality of his *bijin* and fully endorsed it, as seen in his advertisement of his first collection of woodcut illustrations, the 1909 *Yumeji gashū: Haru no*

*maki* (Yumeji collection of works: Spring volume): “Young boys who do not know the ‘Yumeji-style beauty.’ Young girls who do not know the Yumeji-style eyes. Well, you! Look through the *Yumeji Collection of Works*. You will certainly be taken aback by the intensely modern flavor of the young girls illustrated. And you will most certainly be enamored with their sparkling eyes and charming allure.”<sup>16</sup>

This illusion, which conflated the real and ideal, went beyond a simple reflection of reality to fashion a type that female audiences yearned to become. It is this very accessible sense of “modern flavor” (*kindai teki shikisai*) and its marketing that distinguishes Yumeji’s *bijinga* from other depictions of women in the early twentieth century—the fashioning of a *bijin* image rooted in reality, as an actual type of woman, yet born out of idealistic aspirations.

While many displays of feminine beauty and the female body targeted a male audience in their appeal to a sexually charged gaze, the figure of the *bijin* in Yumeji’s art orchestrates a different kind of experience. In addition, the relationship between Yumeji, the male artist, and the female protagonist—both as model and object—generates another layer in its reception by a female clientele.<sup>17</sup> Information on Yumeji’s life does offer an insight into his relationships with his female models and the nature of his romantic liaisons with them, and the tension between the male artist as *creator* and as *procreator* is equally significant. Scholars such as Marsha Meskimmon have considered the interaction between the artist and the female subject, as well as the underlying inequality of sexual economy and power structure within the art-subject relationship.<sup>18</sup> In addition to situating Yumeji’s *bijin* as a modern receptacle and topos in the discussion of modernization, westernization, and new concepts of female gender roles in early twentieth-century Japan, the visual language he employed in the portrayal of the female protagonist creates a space for his female audiences to participate in her image. Unlike the male gaze, which distanced and objectified the depicted figure, Yumeji’s female viewers interpreted his images as projections of their own identities and as embodying a modern sensibility. It is not my intention, however, to suggest that the relationship of the Yumeji-style beauty with its female audience was analogous with that between a female audience and a work by a female artist.<sup>19</sup>

In the case of Yumeji’s female imagery, the elusive role of the Yumeji-style beauty makes it a site for the modern rather than a specific gender model. The *bijin* can also be interpreted as the face of a brand, a conceptual site of modernity and surrogate body, in the way that T. J. Clark treats sites of modernity as territories associated with leisure, consumption, spectacle, and money.<sup>20</sup> Yumeji’s *bijin* mediate between the privileged view of the male artist and the aspirations

of the female audience that consumed them. Through his avid female fans and the establishment of the Yumeji style, his images demonstrate a kind of female spectatorship, and it is in the pictorial idiom of the *bijin* that this interpretation can occur. The clumsily rendered, oversize hands and feet, the willowy figure swathed in a kimono, and the large, seemingly unfocused eyes all contribute to a sense of subjectivity that is both void and all-inclusive of identities that female audiences desired to project onto the image. These visual indicators enabled contemporary female viewers to project their own identities within the broader Taishō-period cultural context.

## THE YUMEJI BRAND

It is clear that Yumeji's *bijinga* created a locus around which associations regarding the very definition of the modern Japanese woman were formulated. His images of beauties were linked with the Yumeji name, thereby establishing a kind of cult around the style of *bijin* identified with him. In addition, the Yumeji name came to assume a kind of Yumeji brand:

From the late Meiji, Taishō, to early Shōwa many people were intimate with Yumeji's pictures. The early Taishō marked his golden period—it was a time when I saw Yumeji-like beauties on the streets. The dreams and aspirations of young people at that time were enraptured by the kind of sentiment in Yumeji's pictures and poems. He seems to have been especially popular with schoolgirls and young women. Yumeji-designed goods such as waist sashes [*obi*], collars, handkerchiefs, summer kimonos [*yukata*], even dolls and other merchandise were marketed commercially, and as a result his popularity swept through the whole country, and the term *Yumeji-shiki* [Yumeji style] came into usage.<sup>21</sup>

In effect, the *Yumeji-shiki bijin* became a kind of “meta-figure or an icon,” as described by Miya Lippit in the discussion of the role of the *bijin* in modern Japan.<sup>22</sup> In the case of the *Yumeji-shiki*, it had surpassed the ideologically constructed author, or in this case the individual artist.<sup>23</sup>

The term *Yumeji-shiki* and what it came to represent not only applied to actual Taishō-period women described as such but moved beyond the artistic realm of his work and into the realm of a brand. By the early 1910s the popularity of the *Yumeji-shiki* created a commercial market for Yumeji-designed objects. Yumeji was well aware of this trend, and in October 1914 he established the shop

Minatoya Ezōshiten, near the Nihonbashi *gofuku* (kimono fabric) district. The term *ezōshiten* (bookseller's shop) supposedly paid homage to the Edo-period publisher Tsutaya Jūzaburō (1750–1797), who had issued the woodblock prints of the celebrated artists Kitagawa Utamaro (1753–1806) and Tōshūsai Sharaku (active 1794–95).<sup>24</sup> Yumeji's shop was commonly known as Minatoya, or “Harbor Shop,” a reference to the harbor shops that received imported goods and commodities from foreign ships arriving in Japan. One of his prints dating from this period, containing the Minatoya (Minatoya Ezōshiten) seal (fig. 1.4), even includes an image of a black ship in the upper right-hand corner. The black ship, or *kurofune* in Japanese, is associated with the description of the large black Western ships arriving in Japan in the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries from Portugal and the United States, and alludes to the general flavor of the foreign (*ikoku*).<sup>25</sup>

The painting *Kurofuneya* (see fig. 1.3) connects with these shops and their foreign nature, as indicated by the three characters for *Kurofuneya* (黒船屋; black ship shop) inscribed on one side of the red box. The characters on the other side of the box are only partially recognizable, including the character *iri* (入; to enter), which might be one of three characters reading *irifuneya* (入船屋) and therefore a reference to Yumeji's Minatoya shop. *Kurofuneya* was an allusion to the imagery of foreign ships, and by extension foreign culture. Yumeji called his small Nihonbashi shop Minatoya, but in his illustrated autobiographical novel, *Shuppan* (Sailing off), the shop is also known as Kurofuneya.<sup>26</sup> *Shuppan* was serialized in the newspaper *Miyako shinbun* in 1927; the title *Shuppan*, which conjures up the image of a ship about to set sail from the harbor, fits with the overall themes of departure in Yumeji's work and his interest in the foreign.

The connection with the foreign is apparent in Yumeji's work, not only through his Minatoya shop but also in how he incorporated and was aware of diverse Western artistic influences and waves of global modern aesthetics. These included Art Nouveau, the work of modern graphic artists such as Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864–1901), avant-garde styles such as German Expressionism, the Arts and Crafts movements led by William Morris (1834–1896) and John Ruskin (1819–1900), and even the Bauhaus. In May 1931, the forty-seven-year-old Yumeji finally realized his dream of traveling to the West, first to Hawai'i, then California, and on to Europe before arriving back in Japan in September 1933. He went to Taiwan to hold an exhibition soon after his return, roughly a year before his death on September 1, 1934. This later part of his career will be discussed in the epilogue.

**FIG. 1.4.** Takehisa Yumeji, *Minatoya Ezōshiten* (Minatoya shop), 1914–15. Color woodcut. Sold by Minatoya. Collection of Chiyoda City Education Board.



The Minatoya storefront perfectly conveys Yumeji's eclectic interests and aesthetic styles, and exudes this foreign feel. A photograph taken in front of the shop in 1914 (fig. 1.5) shows a large Japanese-style hanging lantern inscribed with the shop name, Minatoya Ezōshiten, and the motifs of a Dutch ship, waves, and birds. A thick red cloth banner embroidered with gold thread, also with the name Minatoya Ezōshiten, hangs above the entrance, and a banner-like object adorned with designs of mushrooms and small birds is displayed in the shop window. The woman leaning on the shelf of illustrated books and prints is Tamaki, by this time Yumeji's ex-wife.<sup>27</sup>

In an announcement for the launch of the business (fig. 1.6), Tamaki notes that the shop carried a broad assortment of elegant objects:

ITEMS AT THE MINATOYA

Beautiful things,  
cute things,  
and strange things  
such as *haneri*  
battledore, dolls,  
and illustrated storybooks.  
(Eastern Gofuku Bridge)

Minatoya also sold items such as cards, poetry books, decorated umbrellas, paper, fans, and scarves, all of which Yumeji designed.<sup>28</sup> His prints with botanical designs took on the feel of decorated paper, such as in the charming motifs in *Ichigo* (Strawberry: fig. 1.7). These same strawberry patterns also appear in his clothing, such as *Obi, Ichigo* (Obi sash, Strawberry; fig. 1.8). The shop soon attracted many young schoolgirls. In fact, there is an account from the headmaster of the Joshi Gakushūin (Women's Learning School), who observed that all of his female students owned something made by Yumeji.<sup>29</sup> Some of Yumeji's items, such as his garments, were so popular that fake versions of his products were sold.<sup>30</sup> By purchasing Yumeji goods from Minatoya, the artist's predominantly female clientele was able to inhabit the space of the *Yumeji-shiki bijin*, thereby becoming one by association.

Scholars in the social sciences and consumer research have discussed the cultural meaning of consumer goods and the transfer of their meaning onto the consumer herself (thus forming part of the construction of the self and identity).<sup>31</sup> Grant McCracken explains these "person-object relations" as comprising the role of advertising and product design, which transfer values and meanings of the "culturally constituted world" to the object, then describing how con-



**FIG. 1.5.** (left) Kishi Tamaki in front of the Minatoya, 1914. Takehisa Yumeji Ikaho Museum.

**FIG. 1.6.** (right) Takehisa Yumeji and Kishi Tamaki, advertisement for the Minatoya, 1914. Color woodcut. Collection of Chiyoda City Education Board.

sumption, or what McCracken calls “possession ritual,” transfers this meaning from the object to the individual consumer.<sup>32</sup> We can consider Yumeji’s role as both artist and brand image as the social construct within which the initial symbolic meaning is given to his Minatoya goods. Yumeji’s consumers—in this case, the female clientele at his Minatoya—then take on the next step of transfer. Their act of consumption completes the transfer of meaning from the object to themselves and by extension facilitates “acts of self-definition and social communication.”<sup>33</sup> McCracken describes the meaning transferred to the individual as one of “collectivity,” thereby providing a communal identity to consumers (individuals) who share in this act and means of subject formation.<sup>34</sup>

The social impact of Yumeji’s Minatoya goods speaks to how the Yumeji brand could offer his clientele a communal experience and shared identity. Yumeji’s goods could transfer meaning onto their own subjectivity by providing



**FIG. 1.7** Takehisa Yumeji, *Ichigo* (Strawberry), 1914–15. Color woodcut, 18.7 x 26.7 cm. Yumeji Art Museum, Okayama, Japan.



**FIG. 1.8.** Takehisa Yumeji, *Obi, Ichigo* (Obi sash, strawberry), 1914–15. Silk sash with hand coloring, 374 x 31 cm. Yumeji Art Museum, Okayama, Japan.

pleasure in both possessing a commodity item as well as appreciating its artistic value. Parallels can be drawn to Arjun Appadurai’s seminal discussion of luxury goods, which elucidates our understanding of the object (or commodity) and its social life, which includes both belonging and camaraderie, thus allowing for the “transformation of the consumer,” whereby Minatoya products can be interpreted as both commodities for use and commodities with “rhetorical and social” value.<sup>35</sup> The construction of a shared identity and subjectivity through these objects becomes an essential function.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, the success of Yumeji’s Minatoya and his entrepreneurial approach to artistic creations as brand products led artists of the next generation, most notably those making *bijinga* or *shōjo* (young woman) imagery, such as Nakahara Jun’ichi (1913–1983), to open shops or design similar items for sale.<sup>37</sup>

As part of this entrepreneurial approach, publicity for Minatoya was seen through other modern art outlets. Advertisements for the Minatoya appeared in magazines such as the art and literary magazine *Shirakaba* (White birch). For example, an advertisement in the October 1914 issue of *Shirakaba* shows a *noren* shop curtain with the place name Gofukubashi (Gofuku Bridge) on the right and the shop name Minatoya Ezōshiten on the left. The advertisement in the November 1914 issue included a promotional paragraph written by Tamaki, which reads:

The evening wind blows the leaves of the *suzukake* [oriental plane] tree in the downtown area and wives restlessly light their lanterns—such are the telling signs of this season.

It is also the season when our Minatoya storefront is filled with goods such as masks with *Kotatsu no Kamiiji* and *Koharu-Jihe*i designs and woodblock prints of autumn scenes. We now have new designs for detachable collars [*hanèri*] taken from Yumeji's *When the First Snow Comes*, *Tiger Finch*, *Falling Leaves*, and *Residues of Seasonal Rain*. By the middle of this month, we are planning to receive goods from Kyoto and Osaka. We also carry new designs of decorated *chiyo* paper, clay dolls, and illustrated books. Moreover, we wish to dedicate a time every month to hold various kinds of gatherings. In November, we will be hosting exhibitions of *hanèri* and woodblock prints. We are planning a *hagoita* [battledore] exhibition in December.<sup>38</sup>

The titles *Kotatsu no Kamiiji* and *Koharu-Jihe*i refer to the main characters Kamiya Jihei and Koharu from the *jōruri* play *Shinjū ten no Amijima* (The love suicides at Amijima) written by the celebrated playwright Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653–1725).<sup>39</sup> The pair of woodblock prints *Koharu-Jihe*i (fig. 1.9) depicts the fateful love story of the two protagonists. They showcase Yumeji's interest in the techniques of Edo-period *ukiyo-e* as well as the influence of the aesthetics and subjects of this popular art form on his practice.<sup>40</sup>

The Minatoya advertisement makes special note of the monthly gatherings at Minatoya, which operated as a location for commercial activity, where Yumeji-designed merchandise was sold, and as a center for artistic interaction in the form of meetings and art exhibitions. Most notably, the aspiring woodcut print artists of the Tsukuhae group exhibited at the Minatoya on a number of occasions (see chapter 4). This dual function represents a seamless intersection of artistic and commercial spheres in which the concept of design and an engagement with popular culture were shaped by his clientele. It also speaks further to how Yumeji situated himself outside official artistic circles in his alternative space and created a specific identity for himself and his work.

Japanese women in the Taishō period were not only enthusiastic consumers of Yumeji's products but also represented a new kind of clientele that activated the *Yumeji-shiki*, allowing it to move beyond a stylistic element in his graphic works and placing it in the social realm as a conceptual entity and an identifiable brand. As the novelist and Yōga painter Arishima Ikuma (1882–1974) recounted,

The so-called Yumeji-style beauty is an ideal example of what Oscar Wilde called "Life Imitates Art." It seemed as if many of Yumeji's lovers had actually been taken out of his drawings. It was not simply that they had the same kind of hairstyle or makeup, but their mannerisms and the



**FIG. 1.9** Takehisa Yumeji, *Koharu-Jihei*, 1914–16. Woodcut. Sold by Minatoya and Yanagiya. Nihon no hanga Collection, Amsterdam.

way they carried themselves were astonishingly similar. During the days when the streets were filled with young women in the Yumeji style, he would often say how eerie it was to bump into someone who was wearing a piece of clothing from the Minatoya that he had designed.<sup>41</sup>

The consumption of the *Yumeji-shiki* permitted the participation of these new consumers in realms that were neither entirely commercial nor artistic. Yumeji designed his goods in response to these consumers, thus giving them agency to change and participate in these spheres. As McCracken explains, the designer “depends on the consumer to supply the final act of association and effect the meaning transfer from world to object.”<sup>42</sup> As such, Yumeji’s items sold at Minatoya are precursors to and the driving force behind the creation of a shared visual culture, and they represent the multimedia context within which both the production and audience experience brought Yumeji’s works to life.



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