

DIANE DE POLIGNAC

**TSUGOUHARU FOUJITA  
(1886-1968)**



As a modern Japanese painter, Léonard Tsugouharu Fujita (or Tsugouharu Foujita) is a major figure of 20<sup>th</sup> century Avant-Garde. Franco-Japanese artist, Fujita admirably combines the fineness of Eastern painting to the boldness of Modern Western Art.

## BIOGRAPHY

### A YOUNG MODERN JAPANESE PAINTER'S YOUTH AND TRAINING

Léonard Tsugouharu Foujita (or Tsugouharu Foujita), is an all-round artist: painter, draughtsman, printmaker, illustrator, ceramicist, photographer, filmmaker and stylist. Born in Tokyo, he was registered for French lessons from primary school. From 1907, he studied traditional Japanese painting and then western painting at the Academy of Fine Arts of Tokyo, from which he graduated in 1910. Tsugouharu Foujita confided: "I was given the prediction that I would be the top painter of Japan, but I dreamed of being the top painter of Paris; I had to go to the source."

### TSUGOUHARU FOUJITA AND HIS PARISIAN YEARS

In 1913, the Japanese painter went to Paris. Immediately after his arrival, Tsugouharu Foujita met Pablo Picasso. Cubist compositions and paintings by the Douanier Rousseau and Picasso's studio plunged him into the universe of the avant-garde. He visited the Salon d'Automne which proved to be an aesthetic shock for him. He also visited the Louvre regularly to copy works there and to soak up western art. In Paris, Foujita became close to the painters of the School of Paris: André Derain, Maurice de Vlaminck, Juan Gris, Fernand Léger, Henri Matisse, Amedeo Modigliani, Jules Pascin, Chaïm Soutine among others. After a short time spent in London during 1914, he returned to Paris with his friends Soutine and Modigliani. His first solo exhibition at the Galerie Georges Chéron in 1917 was successful: Tsugouharu Foujita exhibited 110 watercolours that Picasso admired.

Tsugouharu Foujita began to paint nudes. Several models inspired him, especially his favourite, Kiki de Montparnasse, whose beauty he admired in the famous *Nu couché à la toile de Jouy* (Reclining Nude with Toile de Jouy) (Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris). As a languid odalisque, Kiki's nude caused a sensation at the 1922 Salon d'Automne. Foujita said: "I'm the first Japanese painter to do nudes like western artists."

In 1918, to flee from war, the Polish poet and dealer Léopold Zborowski brought Soutine, Modigliani and his wife Jeanne Hébuterne, and Foujita with his wife Fernande Barry to Cagnes. This was an important time for Foujita who painted with his two friends for an entire summer. There, he met Auguste Renoir just before his death. In 1919, the painter Foujita participated in the first post war Salon d'Automne. His work received official recognition: he became the most popular portraitist in Paris. It is during this period that he developed the themes that can be found throughout his career: nudes, cats, self-portraits and still life. This thematic repetition can be explained by the tradition of Japanese prints

with which Tsugouharu Foujita was very familiar. His variations are a search for the universal.

Foujita's success comes from his original style that places him on the border between east and west. His subjects are drawn with restraint and minuteness on ivory backgrounds that he made, allowing him to place a thin black line and colours in a transparent and light oil.

### THE JAPANESE PAINTER TSUGOUHARU FOUJITA'S INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION

In 1921, he travelled to Italy. The modern Japanese painter was impressed especially by the art of Michelangelo at the Sistine chapel, which influenced his depictions of nudes. In 1922, when Fernande turned away from him, Tsugouharu Foujita met Lucie Badoud whom he nicknamed Youki ("Snow" in Japanese) because of the whiteness of her skin; she became not only his muse but also a face of Montparnasse. In 1925, Foujita was awarded the title of Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur. In 1929, he returned to Tokyo with Youki who left him for the poet Robert Desnos. Foujita was greeted in Japan like a prodigal son. He organized an exhibition that was a huge success. "Painting in the European manner with Japanese brushes and using water-based colours on oil paint is not forbidden. I have succeeded in doing it technically. I had finally forgotten the academic lessons."

The Japanese painter Foujita left in 1931 with his model and new lover Madeleine Lequeux for a two-year voyage around Latin America. Then the couple travelled to Tokyo in 1934. Foujita organized a series of exhibitions at the Nichido Gallery and the Niko Gallery. Madeleine died suddenly in Tokyo in 1936. The painter Tsugouharu Foujita spent time in Paris again from 1939 until the Germans arrived in May 1940 and returned then to Japan. He flew to New York in 1949, and was then united with Kimiyo, who was his last wife. In New York he exhibited at the Komor Gallery and became a professor at the School of Fine Arts of Brooklyn. In 1950, he returned to Paris and settled with Kimiyo back in Montparnasse. Paul Pétridès, Romanet and Jeanne Jarrige-Bernard were then his main dealers. They organized exhibitions for him in Algeria, Morocco and Spain. In 1955, Tsugouharu Foujita acquired the French nationality.

In 1959, the painter Tsugouharu Foujita converted to Catholicism and took the baptismal name "Léonard". This name also evokes his love of the art of Leonardo da Vinci. Foujita had been interested in religious art from early on. The Japanese painter had studied western art, its Greco-Roman roots and the ancient world of the Near East. He was perfectly familiar with religious iconography thanks to the discovery of images as he travelled around Europe, in Latin America and in many international museums. In 1964, Léonard Tsugouharu Foujita decided to decorate

the chapel of Notre-Dame-de-la-Paix in Reims known as the Foujita chapel. The last major project of the painter was the decoration with frescoes of this chapel in close partnership with the architect from Reims Maurice Clauzier.

Léonard Tsugouharu Foujita died on 29 January 1968, in Zurich. The work of the modern Japanese painter speaks for him: "I don't like talking about my painting, because it is the picture that speaks forever, our life is so short."

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Translation: Jane Mac Avock



## SELECTED PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Aix-les-Bains, Musée Faure  
Grenoble, Musée des beaux-Arts  
Le Havre, Musées des beaux-arts  
Nîmes, Musées des beaux-arts  
Paris, Musée National d'Art moderne, Centre Pompidou  
Paris, Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris  
Reims, Musée des beaux-arts  
Strasbourg, Musée d'Art moderne et contemporain  
Villiers-le-Bâcle, Maison-atelier Foujita  
Tokyo, Musée d'Art de Meguro  
Tokyo, Musée National d'Art moderne

## SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

*Exposition Universelle de Paris*, (Paris World exhibition), Japan Pavillon, 1900  
*13th Salon of the White Horse* (Hakuba kai), Tokyo, 1910  
Galerie Georges Chéron, Paris, 1917 (1st solo show), 1918, 1919, 1924, 1932  
Salon Nika, Tokyo, 1917, 1934-1938, 1940  
Galerie Devambe, Paris, 1918  
Salon d'Automne, Paris, 1919-1924, 1926, 1950  
*Cercle Royal artistique et littéraire*, Anvers, group show, 1919  
Salon des Indépendants, Paris, 1920, 1922, 1923, 1950  
Galerie Constant Lepoutre, Paris, 1920  
*Foujita*, Galerie Sélection, Brussels, 1920, 1921  
*First Annual International Exhibition Watertercolors*, Chicago, 1921  
Salon Teiten, Tokyo, 1922, 1924  
Salon de la Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts, Japanese art exhibition, Paris, 1922, 1923  
Salon des Tuileries, Paris, 1923-1925  
Galerie Le Centaure, Brussels, 1922, 1924  
Galerie Katia Granoff, Paris, 1927  
Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, Paris, 1928  
*Salon des artistes japonais à Paris*, Galerie La Renaissance, Paris, 1929  
Galerie Reinhardt, New York, 1930  
Palace Hotel, Rio de Janeiro, solo exhibition, 1930  
Hall d'exposition, Sao Paulo, solo exhibition, 1932  
Galerie Nichido, Tokyo, 1934-1938, 1967, 1968  
Musée des beaux-arts, Tokyo, Mexican period exhibition, 1934  
Galerie Kennedy, New York, 1947  
Galerie Manhattan, New York, 1947  
*Exposition totale d'art moderne du Japon*, Musée national, Tokyo, 1948  
Galerie Shiseido, Tokyo, solo show, 1948

*Foujita Recent Paintings and drawings*, Galerie Mathias Komor, New York, 1949  
Galerie Paul Pétridès, Paris, 1950, 1952, 1954, 1956, 1958, 1960, 1962, 1964  
Galerie Romanet, Alger, 1950, 1951, 1953, et à Paris, 1975  
Marlborough Fine Art Limited, London, solo show, 1950  
Cercle des beaux-arts, Madrid, solo show, 1951  
Galerie Alonso, Bilbao, 1953  
Galerie God Konst, Göteborg, Sweden, 1953  
Musée Bridgestone, Tokyo, 1955  
Exposition d'art sacré, Trieste, 1961  
Galerie Fujikawa, Osaka, 1965  
*Les Années 25, Art Déco/ Bauhaus/ Stijl/ Esprit nouveau*, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 1966  
Musée Yamato Bunkakan, Nara, western art exhibition in Japan, 1966  
*150 ans de peinture occidentale au Japon*, Museum of Modern Art, Kanagawa, 1966  
*Autour du Cubisme*, Galerie Jean-Claude Bellier, Paris, 1967  
Musée Hirano, Akita, 1967  
Galerie Saikodo, Tokyo, 1967  
*Hommage à Léonard Foujita*, Musée de la Ville de Tokyo, Musée de la Ville de Kyoto, 1968  
Musée Hirano, Akita, 80 artworks by Foujita from the Masayoshi Hirano collection, 1977  
*Foujita, centenaire de sa naissance*, travelling exhibition in Japan: Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto, Hiroshima, Fukuoka, 1986  
*Léonard Foujita*, Musée de Montmartre, Paris, 1987  
*Léonard Foujita*, Tokyo Metropolitan Teien Art Museum, 1988-1989  
*Foujita*, Galerie John Sayegh, Paris, 1989  
*Desnos, Foujita et Youki, un amour surréaliste*, Musée du Montparnasse, Paris, 2001  
*Foujita, le maître de Montparnasse*, Palais des Arts, Dinard, 2004  
*Foujita entre Oriente y Occidente*, travelling exhibition in Spain, 2005  
*Léonard Foujita*, travelling exhibition in Japan, 2008  
*Foujita et ses amis du Montparnasse*, Château de Chamerolles, 2010  
*Foujita et Zadkine*, Musée Zadkine, Les Arques (France), 2013  
*Foujita, Centenaire de son arrivée à Paris*, travelling exhibition in Japan, 2014  
*Foujita et la grande aventure de Montparnasse*, Musée Pouchkine, Moscou, 2015  
*Léonard Foujita et ses modèles*, travelling exhibition in Japan, 2016  
*Foujita-Peindre dans les Années Folles*, Musée Maillol, Paris, 2018

## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Michel-Gabriel Vaucaire, *Foujita*, Paris, Éditions G. Crès et Cie, with 32 illustrations, 1925

Paul Morand and Charles-Albert Cingria, *Foujita*, 6th title of the collection «Les Maîtres nouveaux», Paris, Éditions des Chroniques du jour, 1928

Sylvie et Dominique Buisson, *Léonard-Tsuguharu FOUJITA, Catalogue général de l'œuvre, volume 1*, Paris, ACR Éditions, 1987

Sylvie Buisson, *Léonard-Tsuguharu FOUJITA, Catalogue général de l'œuvre, volume 2*, Paris, ACR Éditions, 2001

Sylvie Buisson, *FOUJITA INÉDITS, Catalogue général de l'œuvre, volume 3*, Paris, Éditions Fondation Nichido, Archives artistiques À l'encre rouge, 2007

Sylvie Buisson, Anne Le Diberder, Caroline Boivineau et Al., *Foujita : Peindre dans les années folles*, catalogue d'exposition, Brussels, Éditions Fonds Mercator, 2018

