HOW DO ARTISTS EXPLORE THE IDEA OF THE EXOTIC FROM AN EXTERNAL PERSPECTIVE?

VLADIMIR TRETCHIKOFF AND PAUL GAUGUIN

Chaeyeon Roh
**INTRODUCTION**

In this comparative study, I will analyze three artworks: two oil painting by Vladimir Tretchikoff, Chinese Girl and Balinese Girl, and another oil painting by Paul Gauguin, Merahi metua no Tehamana (Tehamana Has Many Parents, or, The Ancestors of Tehamana). These three artworks explore how artists’ external viewpoint affect the way they look at different culture.

This comparative study aims to provide more in-depth research and analysis on artists’ way of using female figure to represent a culture and the exotic imagery that it creates. Both artists explore the theme of ‘different culture’ by a portraying native woman and the vibrant coloured ornaments around their body that symbolizes each culture they came from. The idea of my artwork stems from my analysis of the artists’ use of technical, conceptual and compositional devices. I am particularly interested in viewing a culture in foreign views, which provokes new ways of looking at a particular culture within exotic feeling. In my artwork, I am going to focus on creating the portrayal of women with cultural contexts.

The reason why I chose these three artworks is because I am highly interested in exploring foreign things. I want to study the fact that we can miss out the meaning when we look at cultures form an outsider’s perspective, and that we rather look at things that is a bit different from its original context. External perspective alters the way people look at a certain culture, and it sometimes provides a completely new perspective of looking at it.
Vladimir Tretchikoff is the Russian-born South African who became famous for his kitsch portraits (1). He painted portraits, animals, still life, and realistic figures in diverse countries like China, Singapore, Indonesia, and later South Africa (2). His works were sold as lithographic reproductions all over the world in the 1950s (1) and as his works were so popular amongst people, they became an icon of kitsch. Millions of copies were bought by young fans and was hung in the family homes in the UK, Australia, Canada and South Africa (1).

He explores portraying diverse culture, such as Chinese, Balian and French, through an external viewpoint (2). The colors used in most of his paintings are overly saturated, just like the colors of Kitsch that presents vibrance of colors in the purest version. In practice, Tretchikoff characterizes the use of turquoise color to paint figures’ skin. He mentioned that it captures the mystique that attract people.

“You look at these women, and all the time they remain mysterious, you can’t really analyse them. There’s a certain - impregnability.”

Sources: (1) Jones, (2) Bell, (3) Freeland, (4) FERNANDES, (5) Newling

Background Information: Vladimir Tretchikoff (1913 - 2006)

What was the artists’ intention for this work?

Boris Gorelik, Tretchikoff’s biographer, says the picture was “one of the most important pop culture icons” of the mid-20th century. Peppiatt agrees, “the word iconic is so often-used and almost debased now, but this really is an iconic image” (1).

In early years of his life, Russian Revolution broke out, and he lived as a Russian refugee in other countries with his family (4). While staying in other foreign countries, he practiced painting, working as a scene painter until his painting skills become good enough.

At the same time, 1950s and 1960s was the time when people around the world started to have expectations toward foreign culture (2). The desire for the exotic and foreign things influenced many artists including Tretchikoff, and it led him to discover the exotic and authentic from the foreign culture that he stayed in.

He stayed at China, Africa, Indonesia and other countries, and the understanding of foreign cultures are evident in his work that stemmed from his experience in diverse countries.

The idea of ‘Kitsch’

*‘Kitsch - ‘art or artefacts characterized by vulgarity, sentimentality, and pretentious bad taste’ (3).

According to the Oxford art dictionary, kitsch is “art, objects or design considered to be in poor taste because of excessive garishness or sentimentality, but sometimes appreciated in an ironic or knowing way”. In the UK, Australia, Canada and South Africa, his works became an icon of kitsch, and has featured in books on retro art (2). ‘Chinese Girl’ was often called as “The Mona Lisa of Kitsch” because an image of a figure of Asian beauty instantly reminds of the Mona Lisa. Also it was often believed that the number of prints of Chinese Girl sold is a lot greater than that of the Mona Lisa (2).

However, Tretchikoff declared himself a real and sincere artist, rejected the “kitsch”. He said it is flexible - it can be either kitsch or quite cool and artistic (3).
**Analysis of Formal Qualities**

The model was sitting in front of Tretchikoff the whole time () -> Natural gaze.

She is not looking directly at the viewers, which makes the painting asymmetrical. If she was looking directly at the viewers, which may seem intentional, then the painting would have been perfectly symmetrical.

**Composition**

Blueish tinted skin - unfamiliar look

This attracts viewer's eyes when they first see the painting. Yellow clothes in the triangular shape naturally leads viewers' eyes up to the figure's face. 

-> This can be seen in the yellow reflection under figure's face

**Cultural context**

Why Blue skin?

-> the way of exoticizing a woman.

Maybe the artist tried to glamorize the figure. By doing that, the artist attempted to create unfamiliar look.

The model of Chinese Girl is Monica Pon-su-san, half-Chinese and half-French (2).

Her look is ideal for the combination of the Asian and Wester.

**Technique**

Scarlet lips (symbolizes feminine)

-> Creates contrast to the figure's blueish skin color

-> stands out from the rest of the features of her face

**Subject's gaze**

The model was sitting in front of Tretchikoff the whole time () -> Natural gaze. She is not looking directly at the viewers, which makes the painting asymmetrical. If she was looking directly at the viewers, which may seem intentional, then the painting would have been perfectly symmetrical.

**Light**

Light sources that comes from the right upper part brightens figure's face and yellow clothes.

**Shadows**

Shadows create strong contrast to the vivid turquoise color.

-> Makes explicit difference of colors

The parts where light touches -> exotic yellow is emphasized.

**Focus Point**

The parts where oil paint is not applied

<Part where oil paint is not applied> <Part where oil paint is applied>

Unfinished background and the bottom part of clothes

Pencil is used to outline the rest of the parts at the bottom. The lines are drawn thickly in order to fit to the oil painting that has bold/eye-catching colors.

**Lighting on her face puts emphasis on oriental features of her face**

**Exotic colors on the figure's face and clothes**

Tretchikoff directly mixed the painting onto the canvas, and this gave his artwork an exceptional richness and color depth (1).

**Black hair, oriental face, and traditional Chinese clothes demonstrates**

**Asian beauty**

**Triangular shape**

-> Five peaks in the figure's yellow clothes lead viewer's eyes up to the point where it should be emphasized (blue skin, the focal point).

**Sources:** (1) Jones, (2) Bell
**Analysis of Formal Qualities**

**Texture of the background** is abstract, rough and turbulent compared to the soft, smooth, and sophisticated texture used to paint the figure.

**Thick application of paint** applied on the background - Impasto - Bold and vigorous brush stroke

The woman is looking down and her body is tilted a little bit to the left.

Looks like she is posing for the artist - maybe intentional?

A contour line of the figure is very clear.

-> Explicitly divides the foreground (figure) and the background

> Emphasises contrast between different textures applied in background and in main figure

> makes the main figure stand out

The figure is portrayed in detail with fine touches.

**Painting of the human figure** - figurative art

> The figure is exotized with the artist's own interpretation of the culture from an outsider view.

Original skin color is still visible in the shadowy area.

> Seems like blue lighting is illuminating the figure's skin. The shadow under the figure's face shows that there is a lighting

Vibrant yellow bodice creates contrast to her body color blue, which is calmer and less saturated.

Unconventional use of colour

-> far Eastern or African subjects

Unusual skin tone (blue) used in her face and rest of her body part

Scarlet lips (symbolizes feminine)

-> Creates contrast to the figure’s skin color

Cool tone in the upper part

-Blue, blue-green, green and purple all have the color blue in common. Analogous colors like this creates harmony

Warmer colors are used at the bottom part

Decorative accessories (necklace and earring) -> Traditional Balinese ornament

Tretchikoff’s paintings were commercially aimed at the middle class. In 1950s when Balinese Girl was painted, economy was booming, and middle-class people had more money to spend than ever.

Maybe these accessories are used to emphasize luxuriousness and extravagance to meet his target's satisfaction in that era?

**Sources:**

(6) Color Wheels, (7) history.com
This painting consists of one dominant figure, who appears to be a Chinese Girl as the title suggests. Although the figure seems to have Chinese culture and characteristics with an oriental face, black hair, and traditional Chinese clothes, Tretchikoff exotizes the figure with blue skin, giving a personal interpretation and a new way of looking at the culture. As he mentioned before, he refers to “imagination and emotion” to tell the story of his own, and this is applied thoroughly in his painting in a way to suggest his external perspective of viewing the culture that is completely different from his.

There are brown shadows around her face, and the contrast between dark, shadowy colors and the blue skin color adds depths to the painting and emphasises the oriental face features of the model. Underneath it, a vibrant yellow color, which is reflected on the figure’s eyes, nose, and chin, is used to lead viewer’s eyes up to the focal point (blue skinned face).
Moreover, the delicate pattern on the yellow clothes shows a high technical quality and some cultural aspects of China.

Likewise, Tretchikoff’s Balinese Girl consists of one figure. Still, the blue color is used, but this time it occupies more space in the painting. This disperses the focal point, the figure’s face, as blue color is widely used to paint the exposed skin of the model. Therefore, the face of Balinese Girl seems less prominent compared to Chinese Girl, where the face is the focal point as it is the only exotic feature/color of the painting.

In Balinese Girl, the background is painted as a contour line of the figure explicitly divides the background and the foreground of the painting. According to Tretchikoff, the background in Balinese Girl might be intentionally missing, or it could be an unfinished background that makes it hard to distinguish the depths of field.

Balinese Girl displays accessories, such as necklaces and earrings. This suggests that the painting symbolises loyalty or prestigiousness, rather than poverty and deprivation, hard-won livings or desperate circumstances among the indigenous populations. This serves as a symbolic function in which the clothes and accessories are used to represent certain culture or to target the group of people.
Function & Purpose of Chinese Girl and Balinese Girl

1. Decorative Purpose

At first, this painting was objected by critics because they said that he was devaluing and commercialising art. To which he responded, “Why should my art only be available to the rich and famous? I want everyone to enjoy my art” (8).

Since then, many of his works were sold as reproductions of lithograph throughout the world in the 1950s and were started to become popular (8). His works were sold at a very cheap price. His attempt in selling his works in lower price played a significant role in altering the way regular people relate to art, the way they obtain it, take ownership of it, display and enjoy it. Millions of copies were bought by young fans and was hung in the family home in the UK, Australia, Canada and South Africa (4), and it became an icon of kitsch - art, objects, or design that can be seen everywhere. This way Tretchikoff achieved his aim of making his works available to all the people, not only the rich and the famous. By doing this, he sought to bring art to the people and help them to generate a living from the work.

2. Commercial Purpose

Not only he was a great artist, but he also was a successful business man. Those that did make him a lot of money, and he has been called the richest artist after Picasso (2). His commercial painting was both technically superb and aimed with dead accuracy at the hearts of the middle class (3).

3. Symbolistic Purpose

Symbolism: A figure in his work
The oriental figures - which later included the noble savages of Africa - are a myth, something he disarmingly pursued.
Vladimir Tretchikoff explained that portraits were of real people, but this people, his women, were symbols of womanhood summoned from the riches of his own imagination and at most inspired by a model or a passing face in the street (8).

His works hardly served for poverty and deprivation, hard-won livings or desperate circumstances among the indigenous populations.

“I think they (Tretchikoff’s works) matched people’s expectations of the exotic,” suggests Boris Gorelik, Tretchikoff’s biographer (2).

-> The reproduction of Tretchikoff’s artworks were widely spreading throughout the world in 1950s and 1960s (4). Although he did not intend it, those copies met people’s expectations of the exotic people what one would encounter on a Grand Tour. People had a strong curiosity and aspirations to traveling the foreign lands.

4. Descriptive function:
Figures in both Chinese Girl and Balinese Girl presents a high likeliness of a person. Tretchikoff portrays the facial features of both models in a great detail in each painting. Sophisticated touches and a realistic approach shown in both painting makes the figure and the actual model look alike.

Sources: (2) Bell, (3) Freeland, (4) FERNANDES, (8) McNay
**Background Information: Paul Gauguin (1848 - 1903)**

French artist Paul Gauguin, a leading Post-Impressionist widely known for his bold colors and contrasts, was important in the Symbolist movement as a painter, sculptor, ceramist, printmaker and writer (10).

Gauguin exhibited with the Impressionists, but his aims ultimately differed from theirs. While they were concerned with outward appearance, he wanted his art to express inner meaning (9).

Although he started his artistic career with Impressionists, he later developed his own, pure, "primitive" art in Tahiti. He produced most of his works in there, painting the local people in exaggerated proportions with flat colors and bold outlines, which are the key characteristics of primitivism. By doing this, he succeeded to keep authenticity and simplicity.

Gauguin pioneered the Symbolist art movement in France an later influenced Fauvism and Expressionism (10).

"I have decided on Tahiti... and I hope to cultivate my art there in the wild and primitive state" (9).
Paul Gauguin, 1890

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**[First Tahitian Trip]**

Before the first trip to Tahiti, Gauguin developed his interest and curiosity by exploring the idea of exotic and imaginary settings. This work shows his enthusiasm and expectation of experiencing Tahitian culture.

His trip started in 1891. As a person who lived in the era of Impressionism, his painting was greatly influenced by that movement. However, he did not like the insubstantial and superficial quality of Impressionist, and thus, he decided to go to Tahiti, where he thought he could express his honest and powerful sensitivities.

A trip to Tahiti does not only means of staying away from urban culture but away from art which did not imply originality (10). He tried to provide a “true vision” when looking at Tahitian culture

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**[Primitivism]**

When Gauguin showed his work done in Tahiti to his friends, they said that he is a “barbarian”, and Gauguin liked the barbarian colors and drawings that can because he believed that it is the only way for him to portray children in Tahiti (12).

Primitivism, emerged during the late 19th century, pursues pure and basic form of art. Gauguin tried to provide an authentic view of looking at Tahitian culture by adopting native Tahitian art, which added stronger colors and simplified form.
**Analysis of Formal Qualities**

- **Primitive Style**: the painting is simplistic in form and color.
- **Exaggerated proportions with flat colors and bold outlines** - seems like an exotic place.
- **Sinuous outlines of the figure**: lines are simplified.
- **Analogous colors used on the background** to achieve a soft/muted effect - makes the figure stand out.
- **Warm colors are used**: red, yellow, and brown to achieve a soft/muted effect - makes the figure stand out.
- **High necked missionary dress**
- **The royal blue stripes and blade-like fan** are contrasted to the soft background (with warm colors) and a painting of a rough/crude nude female figure.
- **The red Tiare flower on her ear**
- **White flowers frame her face**
- **The red Tiare flower on her ear**
- **In Tahiti, flowers mean that she is married.** -> Relationship with Gauguin?
- **Subject matter**: Tahiti woman (Focal point) attracts viewer's eyes first
- **There is no middle distance; there are only foreground and background** -> shallow depth, which makes the painting look more flat.
- **Analagous colors are used on the background**
- **Warm colors are used**: red, yellow, and brown to achieve a soft/muted effect - makes the figure stand out.
- **Focal Point**
- **Background**
- **Foreground**

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**Paintings of the human figure - figurative art**

- **Primitive art**: visual forms like Tehamana (the figure), glyphs, and murals are borrowed from peoples and culture of Tahiti. Shows how Gauguin is influenced by the art of the indigenous people he lived with (13).
- **Subject matter**: Tahiti woman (Focal point) attracts viewer's eyes first
- **Then, they see the background consist of mysterious glyphs and mural that have strong cultural sense** - hints where this woman belongs to / what her cultural identity is.

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**Tahitian Title**

Putting the Tahitian title Merahi metua no Tehamana on the background. -> forms part of the decorative scheme of the background.

**Image 14**: Gauguin, Paul. Merahi metua no Tehamana (Tehamana Has Many Parents, or, The Ancestors of Tehamana). 1893. Oil on [de canvas. H. 75 ; W. 53 cm. The Art Institute of Chicago

Source: (13) “Tahitian Women on the Beach”

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**Source:** (13) “Tahitian Women on the Beach”
Function & Purpose of Merahi metua no Tehamana

1. Descriptive function

Gauguin recorded the likeness of Tehamana, a Tahitian woman. Not only the figure, he depicted other objects such as fruits and fan.

2. Symbolic function

Unlike other artists, Gauguin represents metaphor in the painting itself, avoiding the intermediary of the literary metaphor in his painting (14). The painting is consist of medieval sense of space, unnatural colouring, and connections towards contemporary life and art of indigenous. For Gauguin, “synthetic symbolism”, which refers to his style of flatness and exotic coloration when synthesising what he actually saw and something that is not present. Also Tahiti was more sexually liberated than Paris, people in Tahiti women, who appear in his paintings, wore missionary dress, since Tahiti was undergoing colonisation from France. Also, in this painting, an interpretation based on the interrelationships between the objects that represent culture and the figure.

3. Expressive function

Tahamana was the native wife of Paul Gauguin during his first visit to Tahiti in 1891 to 1893 (4). She was Gauguin’s companion, and the embodiment of his feelings about Tahitian culture is present in the depiction of the figure who looks calm and peaceful.

Purpose and connections to the time period

In the later part of 19th century, European art was dominated by the new trend of decorative and showy paintings that was usually enjoyed by high class people (12). The pleasure that comes from visual and its look became the most important thing. And this trend influenced people to only look for aesthetic aspects present in the surface. This naturally led the internal meaning and story of the art to become less important. This new fashion certainly dissatisfied Gauguin, and from then he decided to move to Tahiti with the purpose of achieving the internal and genuine experience of another culture. He expected to find the beauty of simplicity and honesty from Tahiti’s primitive culture.

Moreover, the artwork was painted during the “Grand Tour” - European tendency to exoticize the East” (4). This accelerated his desire to escape the changing civilisation in Europe.

Cultural aspects

In order to achieve his purpose of finding internal and genuine art, he tried to understand Tahitian culture and consider from their perspectives. This requires an immediate encounter, and not studying ‘external facts’ like geography, religion, and history. It requires him to break the cultural barrier. However, his attempt in understanding Tahitian culture, which has been established for more than thousand years, as a European could not bring a full understanding of the culture. He borrowed the culture of Tahiti, interpreting the culture in his perspective, and it was even harder for the European audiences to understand. However, the modern art is stemmed from his dissatisfaction of the art in that era, and thus his attempt to explore and experiment a new form of art should be appreciated.

“Art is the best possible window into another culture” (4).
# Vladimir Tretchikoff and Paul Gauguin
## Compare and Contrast

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<th>Composition</th>
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<th>Cultural Context</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Chinese Girl</strong></td>
<td>- Highly vibrant use of colors - yellow, Turquoise and scarlet red.</td>
<td>- Tretchikoff showed a new way of portraying female through the use of unconventional colors to paint the figure’s skin. By using an unusual skin tone, he exoticized a woman.</td>
<td>- The painting has shallow depth, as shown in the background and foreground of the painting that has no shadows. There is no middle distance, which makes the painting look more flat. This corresponds to the characteristic of primitivism, which lacks perspective and techniques like chiaroscuro.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Balinese Girl</strong></td>
<td>- All parts including the background is completely painted, which disperses the attention.</td>
<td>- A representation of asian beauty is effectively shown through a detailed portrayal of facial features and a combination of coloured painting and oriental painting.</td>
<td>- The painting has composition where he simplifies lines with flat brush stroke.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Merahi metua no Tehamana</strong></td>
<td>- The painting has shallow depth, as shown in the background and foreground of the painting that has no shadows. There is no middle distance, which makes the painting look more flat. This corresponds to the characteristic of primitivism, which lacks perspective and techniques like chiaroscuro.</td>
<td>- Female’s lifestyle, which comes from their own culture, is represented through including objects and accessories around the figure. Those objects could also represent roles that they had to take charge in their society. For example, in <em>Balinese Girl</em>, the turban that the figure is wearing shows that she normally do field works or households. In contrast, the figure in <em>Merahi metua no Tehamana</em> seems like she lived more wealthy and stable life.</td>
<td>- Gauguin creates symbolic rather than naturalistic image by simplifying lines, color, creating areas of flat colors (Graham-Dixon). At the same time, this flatness stresses thick brushstrokes and colors.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>All three artworks</strong></td>
<td>- Represent the idea of female from Tahiti through the use of symbolism.</td>
<td>- [Chinese Girl and Merahi metua no Tehamana] By looking at another culture from an external perspective, which is beyond the scope of their cultural standard, artists explore new perspective of viewing the culture through portraying their wife.</td>
<td>- All artists used oil paint on canvas to depict a woman. A direct observational painting is achieved by a woman being a model for the artwork. Thus, more authentic portrayal could be done, which is an important factor to represent the culture that the figure belongs to.</td>
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**DescripHive funcHon:** all three artworks portray a figure; they all record the likeness a women from another culture.

**Both artists presented the concept of ‘exoticism’ through personal interpretation and imagination. Gauguin’s painting is symbolic rather than natural, as shown in his painting where he simplifies lines with flat color sets. Likewise, Tretchikoff’s paintings relies heavily on his own imagination that is inspired by a model or a passing face in the street.**

**Both artists presents their own interpretation and perception of an external culture by using female figures.**

**Cultural Context:**

- Black hair, oriental face, and traditional Chinese clothes demonstrates oriental beauty.
- The figure is half-Chinese and half-French, which is an ideal combination of Asian and Western.

**Exploration of diverse oriental culture is shown in his interest in portraying Chinese and Balinese girls.**

**Cultural Context:**

- [Chinese Girl and Merahi metua no Tehamana] By looking at another culture from an external perspective, which is beyond the scope of their cultural standard, artists explore new perspective of viewing the culture through portraying their wife.

**Cultural Context:**

- All artists attempted to explore the beauty and serene virtues of the native women and culture from an external viewpoint. Their fascination with exotic-looking young girls are well presented in their paintings.
- Portrayal of certain culture is depicted in detail with exotic and vibrant colors used on the ornaments of female figures.

**Technical:**

- The painting is incomplete; the background and bottom part of the figure’s clothes are not painted. This emphasizes the figure’s blue face and yellow clothes from the rest of the parts that are not painted. Thus, the figure’s blue face becomes a focal point.

**Technical:**

- Tretchikoff applies thick paint on the background - Impasto. This bold and vigorous brush stroke creates contrast to the painting technique applied on figures (detailed/fine brush stroke)

**Technical:**

- The lines and shapes on figure’s clothes lead the viewer’s eyes up to the face, which is the focal point.

**Technical:**

- Gauguin creates symbolic rather than naturalistic image by simplifying lines, color, creating areas of flat colors (Graham-Dixon). At the same time, this flatness stresses thick brushstrokes and colors.

**Technical:**

- All artists used oil paint on canvas to depict a woman. A direct observational painting is achieved by a woman being a model for the artwork. Thus, more authentic portrayal could be done, which is an important factor to represent the culture that the figure belongs to.

**The figure is emphasised through the use of unsaturated and dark colors on the background.**
How has the concept of culture been addressed within the work?

- Vladimir Tretchikoff

June King McFree Conceptual Framework

**AUDIENCE’S WORLD**

- In the 1950s and 1960s, people’s expectations of exotic and foreign things led to a strong desire to travel to foreign lands (2). At that time, ‘Tourism’ and the idea of exotic affected those people who seek understanding of alien cultures (8).
- Due to the post-war and colonialism, people tend to buy cheap prints rather than expensive ones that was normally targeted for the upper class.
- “Kitsch” was viewed as a bad taste and something tacky, rather than “serious” art, by the high-end art galleries (16).

**ARTWORK**

- His works were exhibited and sold in department stores around a number of nations. This way, the “ordinary” public was targeted for the first time.
- During the post-war years when people lived a life of austerity, Tretchikoff’s works that contains “exotic” from the other culture became the trend for working class people.
- A large reproductions of Tretchikoff’s works internationally and its value was recognized by the audiences.

**ARTIST**

- Tretchikoff moved to Harbin in China at the age of five (16). He is Russian-born South African but influenced by Chinese culture at young age. His diverse national background led to the combination of the Asian and the Western in his artworks.
- Romanticism: Tretchikoff emphasized imagination and emotion, which is opposite to neoclassicism (12). He emphasised heavily on his own telling.
- From young age, he worked as a scene painter. By the age of sixteen, he got proficient with painting, and his talent was highly recognised that he received a commission for portraits from Chinese executives of Chinese-Eastern railway (17). His technique is reflected in the portrayal of a woman.
- He worked as an art director in the community called Shanghai Russians (17). He was successful as a business man, which allowed him to market his art prints around the world.
- Russian Revolution broke out and a lot of people became Russian refugee from the Communist regime (17).
- Art was often suppressed by governments and other political powers since art was thought to be provoking a critical resistance, establishing a new national identity by evoking cultural roots (8). For this reason, artistic practices during twentieth-century reflected the emergence of many nations into independence from colonial rule.

**Source:** (2) Bell, (8) Freeland, (12) Gombrich, (15) McNay, (16) Rohrer, (17) The Irish Times
How has the concept of culture been addressed within the work?
- Paul Gauguin

June King McFree Conceptual Framework

**AUDIENCE’S WORLD**

- Neo- and Postimpressionism were both spreading: artists experimented with their styles, and color of their art (9).
- Aesthetism and decorative trend. e.g. Japanese prints were highly appreciated throughout Europe (9).
- Artists started to seek for independent styles with an aim of escaping the historical styles (12). e.g. Art Nouveau in France

**AUDIENCE**

- European audiences (mostly French audiences) were targeted to be intrigued by the beauty of the Tahitian women and the environments.
- At that time, Gauguin’s artworks caused misunderstandings and disappointments, which were so different to what Gauguin expected. Just like when Westerners collect non-Western art, they miss much of its original context and meaning (8)
- Gauguin’s reputation was recognized after his death.

**ARTWORK**


**ARTIST**

- Gauguin thought Tahiti as a primitive paradise (18). In there, he developed a primitive style and techniques influenced by the art of the indigenous people he lived with.
- Gauguin did much traveling around the world during his artistic career to discover artistic purity and primitive in Polynesian life and escape the European struggle.
- Influenced by the arts of Africa, Asia, French Polynesia and other non-western culture.
- A French post-Impressionist artist
- Pursued a Synthetist style of modern art, where color and form are equally important.

**ARTIST’S WORLD**

- THE GRAND TOUR: Asian art has had vast impacts on the West across the centuries. Some of these appropriations are symptoms of a long standing European tendency to “exoticise the East” (8).
- Tahiti had been thoroughly Christianized and colonised by French (19).
- Tahiti was viewed as an allegedly exotic foreign land from other countries.
- Tahiti was more sexually liberated than France Paris (20) and was a westernised community.
Connecting My Artwork to the Artists

Image 18: Strangers, Chaeyeon Roh, 75 x 105 cm, 2017, mixed media on paper
Source: my own photograph

I was inspired by the artist Vladimir Tretchikoff, who portrayed women’s face with blue color, and the concept of “exoticizing” in his work was also applied in my work. An interesting thing about this piece is that I exoticised myself (at the very left) as a white woman, trying to explore the idea of being in a foreign situation and the concept of turning a person into an unusual and alien figure.

I worked from photographs I took in Fiji (see next page) when I was painting leaves, flowers, and motifs. I put these because these are the things I saw most often, and the things that I think best represent Fiji island. Although these are not actually the best representation of that culture, that is what seems to be important from traveller’s eyes. Some native people could regard this kind of external perspective as something wrong or unacceptable. However, on the opposite, I think this viewpoint can provide a new insight to the conventional thinking.

Moreover, a new style was utilized in this piece with pastel shades that contrasts to the previous works, since I always pursue trying new and different styles and techniques of drawing.

Mixed media
- Watercolor
- Guache

Artwork Description
Having my overall theme in IB Art as an “external perspective”, I wanted to focus on my experience of visiting Fiji island. Visiting another country means being a foreigner in that place. Since foreigners have completely different experiences and thoughts, their perspective of viewing one culture is likely to be an external perspective. And the difference between how natives and foreigners view one culture proves the difference.

Based on my interest in “external perspective” of viewing one culture, I specifically referred to Fijian culture for this piece. Since I am a foreigner from Korea, my perspective of looking at Fijian culture is an external perspective. Thus, my artwork itself presents an idea of external perspective as it shows how I, as a foreigner, feel or see the cultural aspects of Fiji.

Political function: race
As a political function, the idea of race was explored in this piece: the figures in the artwork present different races. Although the race is all different, the figure’s height, scale, style, and shape of body is the same. And these similarities create harmony and balance, which conveys the feeling of friendliness and unity.
When people think of an “external perspective”, often a lot of people say they feel fear, and unfamiliarity because it is something that they have not experienced before. However, I tried to show how external figures, something or someone different, can permeate into another culture and become familiar and feel a sense of closeness.

Furthermore, this idea of unity and harmony portrays today’s diverse culture and community. In order to emphasise this idea, I tried to make everything proportional. As I said before, the scale and height of the figures are same. On the background, I put plants on both sides and Fijian motif underneath it. Therefore the whole image contains a sense of unity compositionally.
1. Background

- **Frangipani tree**
  This tree has an interesting round shape unlike other trees with sharp edges. I drew this tree in blue at the background.

- **Neoveitchia storckii**
  I saw this tree whenever I went outside. This tree is common in the areas that are hot and humid, which shows the weather in Fiji.

- **“Sulu”**
  Sulu is a wrapped skirt traditionally worn by people in Fiji. They gave this to us and we wore this during the trip. I drew the Fijian motif at the background.

*All photographs are taken by myself when I went to Fiji island. Most of background and objects are extracted from the photographs that I took. They are all related to Fiji internally and externally, and they act as a visual representation of Fijian culture.

2. Objects

- **Plumeria - a flower that I saw in Fiji.**
  I saw this flower when I went outside for service. Then, I found that this flower is in the drawing of native Fijian.

- **The hat that I bought in souvenirs shop.**
  Since it is something that is for travellers, I thought it would represent me as a tourist who is from outside of Fiji.

- **Accessories such as earrings and necklaces that look very modern.**
  These are jewelries that my friends and I brought to Fiji. People with these accessories show that they are from outside, not assimilated to the nature and culture of Fiji -> distinguishes ‘visitors’ and ‘natives’.
## Connection to the Artists

### Chinese Girl
Vladimir Tretchikoff

**Composition**

All figures are facing right side, not looking directly at the viewers (which can seem intentional).

**Technique**

Vladimir Tretchikoff included symbolic features in *Chinese Girl* by drawing traditional Chinese clothes that contains Chinese motifs. And the technique is used as a representation of Chinese culture. Likewise, I included Fijian motifs on the background to convey cultural aspects of Fiji.

Furthermore, I drew patterns I saw in Fiji on the left figure in order to represent the influence of that culture on foreigners.

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### Balinese Girl
Vladimir Tretchikoff

**Composition**

Also, each of three pieces contain one figure and traditional features. For instance, both figures in Tretchikoff's pieces are wearing traditional clothes and accessories. Likewise, one figure in my artwork has traditional flower on ear. In addition, the other two figures also have accessories.

**Technique**

Tretchikoff drew traditional accessories in great detail on *Balinese Girl* to illustrate Balinese cultural features. This way, cultural aspects of Bali are emphasized in the painting. Influenced by his technique, I also drew modern accessories exquisitely on the figures in order to represent traveller's cultural aspect that is opposite to native Fijian culture.

An exquisite depiction of accessories contradict the simplistic and illustrative style used in the other parts of the painting.

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### Merahi metua no Tehamana
Paul Gauguin

**Composition**

Both glyphs on the background are borrowed from the culture that we are not a part of- Tahiti and Fiji

**Technique**

Simplistic quality - a characteristic of primitivism: no shadows, therefore no depth in the painting. This has a connection to Gauguin's primitive style of painting.

**Concept**

Both artwork contains the image of female with traditional features that is native to the culture.

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### Vladimir Tretchikoff

**Similarities**

- Common Kitsch colors (3)
- Similar color scheme: the colors that I used in my painting almost matched with common colors of Kitsch, which Tretchikoff often used in his paintings.

**Concept**

A concept of exoticizing a woman: Tretchikoff exoticized Chinese/ Balinese girl into an unusual looking figure by painting their skin with blue color. In my artwork, I also exoticised myself as a white woman. Both Vladimir Tretchikoff and I expressed the idea of turning a person into an unusual and foreign figure.

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### Vladimir Tretchikoff AND Paul Gauguin

**Similarities of all artworks**

- All figures are facing right side, not looking directly at the viewers (which can seem intentional).
- Both glyphs on the background are borrowed from the culture that we are not a part of- Tahiti and Fiji

**Cultural Context**

Foreigner’s viewpoint of looking at a culture.

- Russian-born South African artist Vladimir Tretchikoff portraying oriental beauty of women. He portrayed women from China and Bali, which are very different culture from his.
- Paul Gauguin, a French artist, getting inspirations from Tahiti and portraying Tahitian woman.
- I, a student artist from South Korea, referred to the culture of Fiji and native Fijians

Also, the two artists and I used female figures to represent certain culture. By using accessories and ornaments, tradition and culture is effectively shown.
During the process, I realised that different physical arrangement can convey different meanings. Since figures are close to each other, physical parts overlap and various physical arrangement could be made. Before I finish painting the figures, my visual arts teacher suggested me to consider which figure should come first, second and last. On this page, I came up with three different physical arrangements and commented on the effect of it.

1) In order from left

When I arrange figures in order from left, the figures on the left side are emphasised. By arranging figures in this way, it can naturally lead viewer’s eyes from left to the right. Also, it could give a sense of rhythm by repeating the same sized figures repetitively.

**Reflection on My Own Work**

By researching the two artists, I learned that maybe looking at another culture, which is external and beyond the scope of their cultural standard, is a way towards building new identity. Also, during the project, I could relate my artwork to a political theme because the idea of race was explored with female figures having diverse ethnic background. I think this diversity represent today’s society and how different culture is now shared and interacted.

Next time, I will improve this piece by including figures with more diverse races in order to convey the idea of diversity. Also, I want to include male figures in the painting to represent the whole society. I think including both male and female figures would convey the theme of external perspective and diversity more effectively.

**Physical Arrangement**

The figure in the middle is Fijian and the figures on both sides are travellers (non-natives).

**Positives**
- By arranging figures from both sides at the front, the concept of “exotic” is emphasized.
- By arranging travellers at the front, the artwork conveys harmony that three different races and identities create.
- The painting becomes more proportional as figures from both sides are placed at the front.

**Negatives**
- The middle figure at the back can be less emphasized.

2) Figures from both sides at the front

The figure in the middle is placed at the front, and the rest are placed behind the middle one. This way, the tradition and cultural aspects of Fiji is emphasised, creating harmony with the features at the back.

**Positives**
- Since the background is based on Fijian culture, native Fijian creates a sense of unity with the background.

**Negatives**
- Rather than accepting external culture, the native cultural features are emphasized. However, this arrangement would not match with my intention of emphasizing the “exotic”.

3) Middle figure at the front

The figure in the middle is placed at the front, and the rest are placed behind the middle one. This way, the tradition and cultural aspects of Fiji is emphasised, creating harmony with the features at the back.

**Positives**
- By arranging figures from both sides at the front, the concept of “exotic” is emphasized.
- By arranging travellers at the front, the artwork conveys harmony that three different races and identities create.
- The painting becomes more proportional as figures from both sides are placed at the front.

**Negatives**
- The middle figure at the back can be less emphasized.

**The Final Decision**

My final decision is 2) **Figures from both sides at the front** because I think this matches with my original purpose of expressing the idea of “external” - viewing another culture from outside. By putting two non-natives at the front, I could emphasise external figure being in the place of another culture and tradition.
Works Cited


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