

**SEXISM IN TOKYO'S NEW PUBLIC ART:
PRELIMINARY RESULTS FROM FIELD RESEARCH**

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ABSTRACT: In recent years Tokyo has seen much construction of large new office and hotel complexes, shopping centers, and other notable redevelopment projects. Almost all of these developments include public spaces such as plazas in their designs, as well as public art such as sculptures, statues, and decorative fountains. A significant number of the statues show nude females. This is to the dismay of many women passersby, who argue that the purpose of these statues is to please men at the expense of women, and that the landscape of the new Tokyo is sexist. This paper is based on field research that was undertaken in Tokyo during summer 1993, and reports on (1) a detailed inventory of public art in the city's new redevelopment projects and major commercial centers; and (2) the results from questionnaires that were administered to a sample of men and women in Tokyo about their opinions on the city's new public art.

Like many other important cities, Tokyo has recently seen much construction of large new office and hotel complexes, shopping centers, and public buildings such as convention centers, museums and recreation facilities. Almost all of this construction includes outdoor public spaces such as plazas, as well as public art such as sculptures, statues and decorative fountains. Many of these projects are extremely well designed, and add significantly to the beautification of the city. However, the design of these projects also reveals many examples of sexism against women, particularly with respect to the unusually large number of statues of nude females that have been included in much of the new construction. This reflects the deeply ingrained gender bias of Japanese society and, I think, detracts significantly from the overall appeal of otherwise impressive architectural achievements.

This paper is a report on field work in Tokyo about sexism in public art at recent redevelopment sites. My interest in this research came initially from casual observations during daily travels around the city, and then from a brief exchange of letters to the editor that I saw about the subject in an English language Tokyo newspaper in mid-1992 (e.g., *The Japan Times*, July 7, 1991, p. 22). The fact that other women were noticing the same patterns in the city's public art, and were complaining, was reassuring. I was also inspired by the excellent book by Leslie Kanes Weisman, *Discrimination by Design*, which argued that urban design by men is often insensitive to women (Weisman, 1992).

As evidence from Tokyo that city planning can be insensitive to women, I refer the reader to a document called the "2nd Long-Term Plan for the Tokyo Metropolis" (Tokyo Metropolitan Government, 1987). This volume is an outline of physical and social planning projects that are underway in Tokyo, as well as a source for insight about planners' goals for the city. We need to look no further than the cover of the English-language translation to see a classic example of gender

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bias.¹ The illustration, drawn by an artist, shows a busy commercial city with modern high rises, Tokyo Tower, and a plane jetting off into the distance. In a separate space, deliberately boxed off from the busy city, is an idyllic suburbia, with greenery, open spaces, and nice homes. In this setting we see people at ease: retired elderly on a bench, wholesome children at play, and a mother and a baby taking a walk. There is also a running dog. In the words of anthropologist Constance Perin, who wrote a very perceptive book based on a content analysis of documents from the planning profession, "everything is in its place" (Perin, 1977). Middle-aged men are missing from the illustration: presumably they are in the office towers or in the jet, going off to Paris, New York or Hong Kong to take care of business, while their wives stay home in the suburbs. This is Japan -- not just Japan, of course -- but very much so, it *is* Japan.

A COMMENT ABOUT SCULPTURE

I want to make it clear from the outset that I am not opposed to nude sculpture. Such sculpture is often outstanding art and is often totally appropriate for beautification of public spaces. What concerned me about the situation in Tokyo is mainly four things: (1) that the absolute number of female nude statues seemed unusually high; (2) that there seemed to be very few statues of clothed females; (3) that in some cases the location and precise setting of nude statues seemed calculated to offend women; and (4) there seemed to be a lack of statues that celebrated achievements by women, such as achievements in art, literature, politics, social reform, and other endeavors. It is within this context, not with any opposition to fine art, that I began to design a research project that would document the situation in Tokyo with data from structured field work.

RESEARCH OUTLINE

My research has several parts. First, there is a review of various literature that applies to my topic: (1) literature about the history and status of women in Japan, with special attention to topics such as the lives of women in urban settings (Condon, 1991; Imamura, 1987; Iwao, 1993; Lebra, 1984); (2) feminist critiques of urban form such as the book by Weisman that I have already mentioned, and studies by other scholars; and (3) a review of urban planning, architecture and related professions in Japan, with particular attention to the numbers of women in these fields and their influence. The research is my M.A. thesis, which I hope to finish in Spring, 1994, so it is required to have this extensive literature review.

A second part of my research, which is the main subject of this paper, is an inventory of Tokyo's statues. It is not enough to just say that there are a lot of nude statues in the city; it is necessary to make a detailed count, and to provide specific data about the nature and extent of the problem.

A third part of my research, which I do not report on here, involves various questionnaires. In one step, I asked a variety of questions about public art in Tokyo to more than 100 young men and women in the city, soliciting their opinions and comments about nude statues and other sculptures. I also conducted on-the-spot interviews of passersby, both men and women, at a site that has several nude statues, asking for opinions. In this instance the sample was 34. A male friend assisted me, asking the same questions to some of the passersby, to control for any possible differences in

¹The Japanese copy has the same illustration. In the oral presentation I showed a slide of this illustration. A copy of this illustration is reproduced in Cybriwsky, 1991, p. 205.

responses according to the gender of the interviewer. I also conducted over twenty in-depth interviews with Tokyoites about their perceptions of the city and its different parts, looking especially at how men and women differ in constructing "mental maps" of the city. I'll report on all of this at another time, and hope to have the results in my thesis. For now, I want to focus on the inventory of public art in Tokyo.

METHODOLOGY

It was more difficult than I first imagined to conduct the inventory. One problem was to define limits to the study. First, I had to define what I meant by sculpture or statue, as opposed to another type of public art. Then, I decided to limit my study to sculptures and statues that were outdoors rather than indoors, or at least plainly visible from street level. I also decided to confine myself to Tokyo Metropolis (the government unit), rather than include suburbs in other prefectures. Other problems were that Tokyo is unbearably hot and humid in summer, making it very uncomfortable for gathering data outdoors. Also, it is extremely costly to travel from place to place in the city. In addition, Tokyo is gigantic. Therefore, it was not possible to do a complete count of public art, and sampling was necessary. This was especially so since I could find no centralized inventory or listing of the city's public art.

How to select where in Tokyo to count statues? Since it was not possible to go everywhere, I made some choices. I focused on areas that I knew to be newly developed or newly redeveloped, because I wanted to emphasize new public art -- the kinds of statues that were being put up in recent times -- rather than "heroes on horseback" that have been around for a long time. Second, I wanted to represent different parts of the city: the center and the periphery, the east versus the west, and so on. Also, I wanted to include different kinds of areas: commercial districts, parks, train stations, and other places that might have public art. It made no sense to draw a sample, such as from a map of Tokyo, because the vast majority of places have no public art at all, and I would have been visiting places for nothing.

Table 1 shows the places that I selected. As you see, there were four different kinds of places, and four examples of each, for a total of sixteen places. This is not a scientific sample by any means, and I can be faulted for being selective. However, as I will show below, I make up for this deficiency by employing still another list of places for field work that encompasses an entire universe. Nevertheless, this list of sixteen places is quite representative of Tokyo, and is not to be dismissed. It includes several of the most famous and most widely used places in the city. Consequently, what you see at Tokyo Station, in Shinjuku, or at Ikebukuro and other places on my list of sixteen, is Tokyo.

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[Table 1: The STUDY AREAS]

I. Large Commercial Districts

- 1 Ikebukuro**
- 2 Shinjuku (including Kabuki-cho)**
- 3 Shibuya**
- 4 Yaesu (part of CBD)**

II. Major Redevelopment Projects

- 5 Ark Hills**
- 6 Osaki New City**
- 7 River City 21**
- 8 Shinkawa**

III. New Parks

- 9 Arakawa Natural Park**
- 10 Kasai Rinkai Park**
- 11 Shinjuku Central Park**
- 12 Showa Memorial Park**

IV. Selected Train Stations (inside and at door ways)

- 13 Tokyo**
- 14 Shinjuku**
- 15 Ueno**
- 16 Machida**

RESULTS

The findings from my field work at the sixteen sites are summarized in Table 2. We see that these sixteen places had a total of 88 works of public art that I defined as sculptures or statues. Included in these 88 examples were 97 figures. That is, some sculptures, such as a statue of a mother and child, had two figures. Of the number 97, forty showed adult human forms. The rest of the 97 were in a broad category called "other". It included numerous abstract sculptures, which are very popular in Tokyo. Of the forty adult human forms, 28 were of women. Of those 28, 22 were nude. Thus, we see that 78.5 percent of all women that are shown in sculpture are nude; and that nearly one-quarter (22.7 percent) of all sculptures were of nude female forms.

[Table 2:Results from the 16 STUDY AREAS]

Total Number of Sculptures – 88

Total Number of Forms in these 88 Sculptures – 97

Human Forms				Abstract Forms			TOTAL
Male	Female	Child	Sub-to	Animal	Abstra	Others	
12	28	5	45	8	41	3	97
12.4	28.9	5.1	46.4%	8.2	42.3	3.1	100%

	Male	Female
Nude	2 2.1%	22 22.7%
Semi-Nude	3 3.1	2 2.1
Clothed	7 7.2	4 4.1

Real Persons(e.g. Historical Figures) Male – 6 Female – 0

I also call the reader's attention to the bottom of Table 2. We see that six of the 97 figures represented real individuals, all of which were men. As was indicated by the titles of the statues, the statues of women, be they nude or clothed, usually represented abstract ideas: hope, peace, the future, tomorrow, the wind, and so on. Interestingly, there were two statues of women called "Hair".

Because of potential criticism about how I chose the sixteen places (even though they are among the most important places in Tokyo), I did the study a second time with another list of places - a complete universe. Tokyo is divided politically into 23 wards, and each ward has a ward headquarters, a kind of a city hall. This is usually a rather large building with a grand entrance and some public art. I went to all 23 ward offices to repeat the study. Because I had never been to more than two or three of these places before, I had little idea of what I would find. My findings from this research are shown in Table 3.

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[Table 3:Results from the WARD OFFICES]

Number of Ward Offices with 1 or more Sculptures – 20
 Number of Ward Offices with No Sculptures – 2
 Ward Office Under Construction – 1
 Total Number of Ward Offices – 23

Total Number of Sculptures – 29
 Total Number of Forms in these 29 Sculptures – 43

Human Forms				Abstract Forms			TOTAL
Male	Female	Child	Sub-	Animal	abstra	Other	
4	14	13	31	4	3	5	43
9.3	32.6	30.2	72.1%	9.3	7.0	11.6	100%

	Male	Female
Nude	1 2.3%	9 20.9%
Semi-Nude	1 2.3	1 2.3
Clothed	2 4.7	4 9.3

Real Persons (e.g. Historical Figures) Male – 0 Female – 1

As we see, twenty of the ward offices had at least one sculpture or statue out front. Two had none and one was under construction. There was a total of 29 sculptures (43 figures) at these sites. (The ward offices had a higher figures-to-sculpture ratio, because several sites featured sculptures with two or more children.) Of the 43 figures, fourteen were of adult women. Of the fourteen, nine were nude, one was semi-nude and four were clothed. One of the clothed women was a historical figure. In terms of percentages, 20.9 percent of all statues were of nude women, and nearly 25 percent (23.2 percent) were nude or semi-nude.

CONCLUSION

Is 20-25 percent of all statues showing nude women wrong, or too many? I don't know, but I think that it is. Some other women think so too, and so do some men. As I mentioned, I am now tallying results from questionnaires, and will know soon what three different samples of men and women in Tokyo think about this issue.

How does 20-25 percent in Tokyo compare with other cities? Is Tokyo different, or worse? Again I don't know, and I don't know how to find out except to repeat the study again. Therefore, I am doing field work once more, this time in Philadelphia, so that I have something to compare against. Similarly, I would like to know what percentage of all sculptures (i.e., all sculptures ever

made) are of nude female forms. I can image that it is a lot, but is it 20-25 percent? How about public art? What should be the norm for public art? These are all difficult questions that need to be considered when evaluating the numerical results of my research.

A second topic to consider is the precise setting of the statues in question. As I was able to illustrate with slides during the oral presentation of this paper, sometimes it is the details of location that make a particular statue more offensive or less offensive to women. That is, because nude sculpture is often fine art, there is an appropriate place for it, including at certain kinds of public settings (in addition to museums). I showed a slide of a nude female sculpture that was in a quiet setting beside a major office building in Tokyo that I thought was quite acceptable. This was in contrast to a similar statue that I showed at the extremely congested entryway to a busy train station (Machida Station, Japan Railways Line). The offending statue sits on a pedestal at a point where pedestrian traffic approaches from all directions, and is clearly visible to thousands of passersby every hour. To the tens of thousands of women who pass this sculpture each day, often more than once a day, the sculpture is a reminder of their lack of status in male-dominated Japan and a constant insult. Hence, another aspect of my data collection is about the details of geographic setting.

Finally, I wonder if it is appropriate to blame sexism in Japanese society for what I have observed? To be sure, Japan is sexist, but is this why there are a lot of statues of nude women? There could be other reasons. For example, Japan is known for much copying of other societies, especially the West. This is particularly true in modern urban planning and design, in which Japan looks a lot like the United States and Europe. Therefore, it may be that the reason why there are so many statues of nude women in Japan is because this is what Japan has seen in the West? I think that the old statues in Japan, such as the ones that I remember seeing in museums, are not so much of nude women, and that the nude statues might be a more recent attempt by Japan to look western.

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