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Fernando Zobél, In Search of an Identity: 1953, First Notes of a Travel to Japan

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Fernando Zóbel, In Search of an Identity 1953, First Notes of a Travel to Japan

This essay discusses an early visit of the artist Fernando Zóbel to Japan, which is not included in his biographies. The evidence of this stay in the Japanese archipelago is kept in a notebook found in the Museo de Arte Abstracto Español de Cuenca in Spain. The notebook is a collection of drawings and notes made by Zóbel between 1 June 1953 and 18 June 1954. This essay seeks to locate the notebook in its context, and identify the subjects represented in the drawings. It analyzes the interest hidden behind these subjects and the intention of the artist, and shows that the style and subject matter are in keeping with the creative moment he was in: searching for his identity.

**KEYWORDS: PHILIPPINE PAINTING • JAPANESE ART • SPANISH ART •
DRAWING NOTEBOOKS • DRAWING INTENTIONS**

Fernando Zóbel was born in August 1924 in the Philippines and died in Rome in 1984. He was of Spanish descent and belonged to the Zóbel de Ayala clan, one of the most prosperous in the Philippines. Everything seemed to indicate that his future would lie within the framework of his entrepreneurial family. However, his vocation guided him to other paths. Given the liberty afforded by his well-off position, despite paternal opposition he opted for humanistic research and the art of painting.

Since his childhood Zóbel enjoyed a cosmopolitan formation, which was completed in a North American university. On two occasions he studied in Harvard University, the first one in 1946, in philosophy and the arts. The second occasion was in 1949: returning just after his degree, he registered again in September, this time in the Faculty of Law, to justify his “escape” from the family business. In this formative stage his interests focused on learning and research in literature, bibliography, engraving, and painting. During this period in 1951 he had the opportunity to participate in a collective exhibition in Boston. His path was taking him outside of the family’s preoccupation. Nevertheless, on his return to the Philippines he tried to reconcile the world of business and the world of art.

Little by little his real artistic vocation demanded more attention. He started to put his mind to painting, at first from a cultural, social, and collective point of view, subsequently becoming more personal and more intimate. He was determined to achieve a universal character in his works. Fernando Zóbel’s painting, which began being eminently figurative, became abstract as he progressed toward a path of formal depuration and internalization.

Notebooks, Drawings, and the Artist

Looking at his great works we should no doubt admire his mastery, but many indications appear in his notebooks that allow us to approach his paintings in several possible ways. Zóbel started to use these notebooks, some pocket-sized, around 1950 and took them with him everywhere he went. Most of these notebooks are kept in the Museo de Arte Abstracto Español de Cuenca in Cuenca, Spain, which he founded in 1966. This study takes off from these notebooks.

A review of criticisms, interviews, and writings about and by Fernando Zóbel reveals that references to his nearness to the Eastern world were frequent and that his refusals to accept such attributions were also constant,

perhaps for fear of being treated in a superficial way or even being regarded through general stereotypes of “the East.”

The early 1950s must have been a crucial stage in Zóbel’s search for his personal and artistic identity. Having lived in the Philippines, studied in the United States, and gone back to the Philippines again, while in every respect conscious of his Spanish heritage, Zóbel must have been acutely divided between the East and the West. In the Philippines he would attempt to trace the ancient origin of the culture of the islands. He would seek to find what was distinctive of Philippine culture by comparing it with other cultures. In 1953 when he went to Japan, probably on business, he was interested in the peculiarities that made one culture different from another: he looked at the streets, the means of transport, the theatre, and the museums with the avidity of one who wanted to know what was different and special about Philippine culture. This quest was recorded through drawings in his notebooks. Considering that a painter’s notebooks gather his more immediate impressions through strokes and notes as well as the selective register of his interests, the analysis of his notebooks can serve as a guide to his travels of approximation, as it were, to the Eastern world in a period in which Zóbel begins to wonder about and search for his identity.

According to J. J. Gómez Molina (1995, 18) one of the virtues of the drawing, which is one of our reasons for this study, is that “El dibujo, al mismo tiempo que configura una idea, comunica e informa de la estructura con la que cada individuo capta el fenómeno” [The drawing, at the same time that it shapes an idea, communicates and informs about the structure with which each person receives the phenomenon]. In confessing himself through his drawing notebooks, Zóbel tells us about his interests, experiences, and how he faces what each travel, visit, or stay offers him. He does it in a personal way, which also reflects the artistic evolution that is being produced in his creation beyond the lines of the drawing in his painting. As Carmen Bernárdez (1996, 96) remarks, “El dibujo no es sólo un conjunto de trazos sobre un papel, sino un proceso de descubrimiento e indagación de la realidad objetiva y, al mismo tiempo, el propio desarrollarse del pensamiento y la creatividad del artista” [A drawing is not only a set of strokes on paper but also a process of discovery and investigation of the objective reality and, at the same time, the development of thought itself and the creativity of the artist].

In drawing there is a double presence of the individual who is expressed through lines and gestures. As Leonardo da Vinci would put it, lines and

gestures both share an intellectual element. In Zóbel's drawings there is a strong element of subjectivity, which he defines to us objectively, something that the painter begins to demonstrate with his caricatures at the beginning of the 1950s. In these links between subjectivity and objectivity we can find the most suggestive value of drawing (Gómez Molina 1995, 18).

Being aware that the line is an abstract and intellectual element, which constitutes an element of knowledge, analysis, and a test of the imagination, we can find at least two categories in Zóbel's notes. They are not only quick sketches in which the artist is trying to materialize his search but also very immediate drawings, which, on the one hand, try to retain some scenes and images that come up before him during the trip and, on the other hand, make of them an element of learning to know and internalize a formal repertoire. We notice that in the latter case he tries to assimilate the teaching of other masters, either anonymous such as the maker of the old Japanese terracotta portrayed in his notebook or the most well-known European painters of the seventeenth century. The drawings acquire a great value for the artist in understanding a work of art. By extension we can say that the drawings also help him in other cases to understand not only a work of art but also the reality where he finds himself.

Art and Cultural Identity in the Philippines

When Fernando Zóbel was 18 years old he was forced to abandon his home and university in Manila because of the Japanese occupation of the islands during the War of the Pacific. This period lasted an entire year during which he was confined to bed due to health problems. As with many other artists, this confinement led him to take an interest in painting. At 22 Zóbel entered Harvard University for the first time, as mentioned earlier. He returned again to Manila in 1949 to work in the family business, something that did not fascinate him. Sensing that he could not devote his life exclusively to the world of business, which he found to be very strange, he decided to return to Harvard. These were his first years of self-taught formation as an artist and also as a researcher.

In 1951 he took part in his first collective exhibition in the Swetsoff Gallery in Boston. For two years, in close collaboration with other artists, he developed as a graphic illustrator in the *Harvard Alumni Bulletin*. During this period his drawing had a caricatural character and usually commented on university campus life. They responded to models and schemes learned

as stereotypes of representation on which he acquired the skill with his hand and developed his capacity of observation and imagination. Regarding this and the interest it can have in relation to drawing, we should point out that among his first research works was the bibliographic study of the British humorist Max Beerbohm (1872–1956) when he was still alive.¹ Beerbohm's work was to Zóbel's liking, and he even bought some first editions of the works by this important caricaturist (Bernad 1985, 86). However, although he learned the use of some strategies of formal simplification and expressive deformation, they barely show in his drawing notebooks of 1953.

At the end of 1952 he returned to the Philippines where he started his artistic activity. Immediately he joined a group of painters who exhibited in the Philippine Art Gallery, among them Arturo Luz and Hernando Ocampo. He was then admitted to the Art Association of the Philippines. In those years after his stay abroad, Zóbel felt extremely involved with the debate about tradition, artistic renewal, and cultural identity.

Due to his great affability and charisma, as well as his outstanding social position, he was elected president of the Art Association of the Philippines in 1953. He then held his first solo exhibition, showing some works that were more symbolic and romantic than those exhibited in Boston. Inspired by Philippine subjects, these new works focused on totally folk subjects, with the street as well as intimate and religious themes being the protagonists of his compositions. We can appreciate vivid and flat colors, surfaces that deny the traditional perspective, and references to Henri Matisse.

Market Scenes in Japan

Because we are interested in his personal and artistic relation with what Europe called the Far East, we have tracked his drawing notebooks to decipher his interest in the art and thought of these cultures.² His notebooks reveal that, in this period of his personal life and artistic evolution, Zóbel traveled to Japan in December 1953 for the first time.³ His first notes concerning the art and culture of China and Japan, except for two frottage made from his ink blocks (fig. 1), were recorded in the notebook cataloged as number 8 (23 August 1952 to 16 April 1953, p. 67). Probably he had an interest in the beauty of the utility, as in this case of reliefs, which could be diluted in water.

In the notebook there is a note about a bazaar called New China (p. 104), represented with hanging umbrellas and paper lanterns for sale that are drawn in a schematic way. This drawing is a good indication of the great

volume of businesses that are run by Chinese people in the Philippines, showing the important presence of this population in the islands since ancient times. For this reason we understand one of the painter's reasons for being closer to the Chinese world than to the Japanese world, at least during the first period.

The notes and drawings that mention this first travel can be found in the notebook cataloged as number 11 in the collection of the Museo de Arte Abstracto Español de Cuenca and which the painter numbered as 9. The notebook gathers several drawings and notes made between 1 June 1953 and

18 June 1954. On page 72, dated 15 December, there are some notes written by Zóbel in very elaborate handwriting that later he decided not to use; these notes refer to Japanese things that attracted his attention and things that he bought: "everything wrapped in cotton, placed in a little wooden box, then in a handkerchief," "at night the noodle vendor."

From page 72 and nearly constantly until page 127, we can see what attracted his attention on this first travel, which were conditioned by his questions and searches of this period. As he was concerned about the subject of cultural identity and autochthonous things, Zóbel was attracted by streets, different cultures, and the novelty of things. He ignored what would become his main interests later: ink painting and calligraphy. During this early period he was interested in the peculiarity of people, their different clothes, means of transport, and ways of movement.

The painting *Maiden Beside the Fruit Stand* (1952, Ayala Museum) and the drawing with the same title that belongs to the Fundación Juan March are from these years. Both show a very tidy and decorative composition of boxes of fruits. They are works that express a naivety and a typical Filipino sense of color, and a way of composing that break with the traditional perspective and ignore the anatomy conventions clearly approaching Matisse.

Allied to these two works are two drawings in the notebook.

The first is a lad with his hands in his pockets standing in front of his notebook, next to a stall (p. 92). Zóbel has not even drawn his features, only a small vertical line defining the nose. He has delineated his contours only. Beside him the stand, which he runs, is totally inclined toward the viewer so we can observe the geometry of the forms on its surface. It is a drawing with very simple lines, only contours, in which the artist has gathered the most essential to keep its memory. It is a composition very similar to that of the painting of the maiden selling fruits beside a stand with boxes of fruits that show their entire color.

The other drawing is more beautiful and complex in its elements and composition (p. 95). Zóbel used the subject as an excuse to create a repertoire of a combination of lines and patterns, and break with the three-dimensional illusion of the representation. On this occasion we can compare it with the drawing of the maiden in the Fundación Juan March mentioned previously. The fruit stand forms the background of the maiden who is sitting on a box staring at the viewer. The shapes of the products that she sells and their layout acquire a decorative atmosphere, which is also intensified by absolute black shading that does not respond to a realism of the representation of light



Fig. 1. *Rubbing from my Chinese ink sticks*. Pencil/paper. Notebook 8, p. 67



Fig. 2. *Woman carrying a child on her back.*
Ink/pen/paper. Notebook 11, p. 95



Fig. 3. *Two deliverymen in a wagon.*
Ink/pen/paper. Notebook 11, p. 93

but to the artist's creative free will. In the same way in the notebook's drawing Zóbel frames the figures and even encloses them in the space where they are found, extending the line of the ground on which they stand until closing completely the rectangle of the space box. The tables and seats with which he fills and closes the rectangle on the upper right side are inclined toward the viewer and again draw the attention of the two-dimensionality of the paper and the drawing. On this occasion the main characters are a woman carrying a child on her back and a girl holding the mother's skirt. While the mother walks in profile they look at the foreigner, i.e., Zóbel, the notebook's author (fig. 2).

Zóbel details the different patterns of the fabrics, circles, stripes, and flowers, patterns that have their replay in both geometric and lineal drawing of the objects on the tables.⁴ As with the drawing of the maiden selling fruits, he uses black shading not to give volume to the forms but to highlight them, and searches to give more clarity to the composition. Zóbel could perfectly respond to this drawing as Matisse (1993, 132) did in the following: "Los preciosismos o los arabescos nunca cargan excesivamente mis dibujos según el modelo ya que forman parte de mi orquestación. Debidamente coloca-

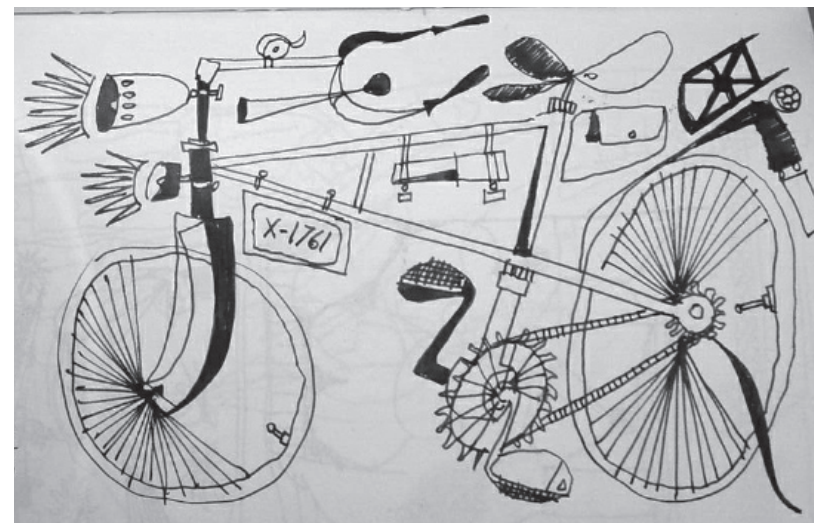


Fig. 4. *Bicycle.* Ink/pen/paper. Notebook 11, p. 97

dos, sugieren la forma o el acento de valores que precisa la composición del dibujo" [The preciousness and the arabesques never fill excessively my drawings according to the model since they take part of my orchestration. Duly laid out, they suggest the form or the accent of values that is required by the composition of the drawing].

Exotic Bicycles and Train Passengers

With this type of drawing, decorative play, and "eye-catching or exotic" subject, Zóbel works on other drawings. One of the most outstanding, published in his *Sketchbooks* (1954), is of the two deliverymen in a wagon with a pile of parcels in the back (p. 93) (fig. 3).⁵ He draws the contour filled with black ink, and the shading with straight or zigzag lines, not only to create volume sensation or space dimension but also to clarify the composition and above all to create an encouraging rhythm, leaving aside its flatness. This way of execution is also used on the bicycle on page 96 where the details of the saddle, the horn, the pedals, or the wheels are executed freely, for example, showing the section of the spokes according to the necessity of fullness or emptiness of the composition (fig. 4).⁶ This bicycle also appears in the drawing notebook previously mentioned.⁷

Zóbel's (1954, 63) claim that "Japan was the country of the bicycles" is made evident on the pages of the notebook. In a more synthetic and cari-

catural tone he tries to gather a collection of samples of the different types of cyclists who travel around the city of Japan (p. 84). His caricatures of the deliverymen loaded with parcels, workers wearing their *hachimaki*⁸ around their heads, and gentlemen wearing hats pedaling upright make us smile. One that is especially funny shows a food deliveryman riding his bicycle with his left hand and at the same time juggling a tray with his right hand (p. 86). Behind him there is another cyclist who moves his head to avoid crashing with the tray. At the top of the composition as a frieze, some figures move their heads unconsciously to the same side following the play of the cyclist at risk. The composition of the drawing is divided into two parts. The upper part is developed with a vertical rhythm in which there are even two short figures, one over the other, to keep such rhythm, linking the lower one through the objects piled on the tray. The lower part is where two cyclists are represented. There is no representation of the space box, only a lineal drawing in which Zóbel fills in some of the forms in black to stress the foreground where the figures as colored accents are projected toward the viewer. The processing of the figures of the upper part is rectilinear and synthetic, with angular forms, while the delineation of the cyclists' contours is a pure play of curves. This occurs with other cyclists represented but in a lighter way, maybe to give the figures a high sensation of movement due to the elasticity of the forms. The execution shows security in the stroke and enormous vitality. The drawings of his cyclists owe a lot to the continuous-line contour drawings, a technique that has an undeniable expressive value.

In this caricatural line Zóbel also shows a collection of male heads with several types of caps and hats of civil servants' uniforms (p. 80). This repertoire captures a variety that attracts the attention of anyone who travels to Japan. Almost every employee who works with the public wears a uniform and hat. On page 75 there is a drawing done with paintbrush and Indian ink of a child wearing uniform as if he were a soldier (fig. 5). In the Cuenca museum's collections is an album of photographs taken by Zóbel during one of his travels to Japan, and there we see that lads wearing uniforms in a military style were among the subjects that caught his eye.

Another subject (such as that of the bicycles) that he was curious about appears on several different pages: the train passengers. He shows us a carriage in motion in which we can see through the windows anonymous passengers holding on to the ceiling rings (p. 91); or sitting inside the wagon we can look to the back of a woman who is wearing a hat and a coat with a large

collar, as well a man wearing a raincoat with some parcels, both holding the ceiling rings; beyond and sitting on the other side, we can see the typical Japanese transport sleeper (p. 99) (fig. 6). In this second drawing the line and its capacity of synthesis are the main exponents; only the leather collar or the curly wool of the woman's coat gives a touch of shade to the composition. All is description. However, in the first one the tracing acquires prominence as a function of the coherence of the subject represented. We find ourselves outside the carriage and we see it pass by. Both the window that separates us from the passengers and the speed of the transport are represented by a play of parallel lines that, together with the shading of the passengers' hats and clothing, undermine clarity to the representation, adapting to the movement sensation.

Individual Subjects

On the last pages of this Japanese block of the notebook, Zóbel individualizes these anonymous figures using Indian ink with paintbrush and not with



Fig. 5. *Child with uniform*. Ink/brush/paper. Notebook 11, p. 75



Fig. 6. *In the Japanese transport*. Ink/pen/paper. Notebook 11, p. 99

pen, as is the usual way. One painting is that of a lady wearing her hat and coat (p. 126) and another of a gentleman also wearing his hat (p. 127) (fig. 7), both holding the ceiling rings. The latter drawing is dated 29 December 1953, probably when his visit had nearly ended. In both drawings he uses paintbrush and Indian ink and, although they tackle the same subject, they have a very different character. In the case of the lady Zóbel uses the gouache with very little ink, putting some darker touches on the hat and its feathers, the ceiling ring and her hand, and shoes. There is no drawing on the contours and the woman's volume is suggested by the lights and shades of the tonalities of the gouache. Moreover there is a discontinuity in the stroke between the feet and the coat so that the representation of the legs only exists in the viewer's eye.

However, the drawing of the gentleman is executed with a very dry paintbrush in a lineal way. The lack of clarity in the execution leads us to think that it is the materialization of a search, which is more related to a technical experimentation than to a subject matter or composition. In fact, on other pages (for example, p. 76), without a concrete subject he seems to



Fig. 7. *Man in the Japanese transport*. Ink/brush/paper. Notebook 11, p. 127



Fig. 8. *Man with umbrella*. Ink/pen/paper. Notebook 11, p. 96

explore the possibilities of the technique, its wateriness, the texture of the strokes, and the different quantity of ink in the brushstroke.

A new subject is introduced with the representation of a *kabuki* actor wearing makeup and a flashy wig, as is typical of some characters of this art form (p. 85). On the same page in the top right-hand corner he has drawn the sketch of a seated male figure wearing a *hakama*;⁹ it is a composition in X. It is a quick drawing with multiple and rectified lines that look for the forms. In the same way he represents another figure in a sitting position (p. 87). Probably it is another kabuki actor performing as a woman. It is a quick drawing and we can deduce that Zóbel's intention was to keep the impression of a visual impact. That seems to be the principal aim of these drawings: to act as a file of images in this imaginary museum that is our memory, in this case from Zóbel's personal Japanese file.

In the drawing notebook some do not have any specific thematic reference to the Japanese world, such as some male individual portraits (pp. 81 and 83) and a simple lineal style double portrait (p. 100), where in the foreground a figure with Oriental features is seated leaning forward with his arms on his knees and in the background a Western figure is standing in diagonal position with his hands in his pockets according to the schematic caricature.

There are two other drawings in the same manner of lineal play, one of which is dated as Okinawa, 22 December 1953 (p. 101). However in this drawing, which could be a self-portrait, a road sweeper wearing a cap and a long-sleeved warm jumper appears in the foreground and a figure wearing a raincoat and carrying cameras and bags appears in the background. This kind of clothing is unbearable under the sun and the humidity of Okinawa. Maybe this drawing is Zóbel arriving in Okinawa in December, warmly wrapped, having come from the main islands.

Something similar occurs with the other drawing in which a gentleman is portrayed wearing a capeline coat with a leather collar and a bowler hat, and carrying an umbrella. He is standing on a rug and there is a palm tree in the background. The palm tree and its closeness to the drawing of the mother with the two children analyzed before refer us back to Okinawa, but this figure dressed warmly is difficult to find in these southern islands (fig. 8).

The representations on the pages of this notebook gather a part of all the things that aroused his curiosity and that attracted him, things that were new because they contrasted with what was familiar to him in the streets of Ma-

nila. But maybe, although not too obviously, there was an attempt to reflect the moment and discover what there was beyond the appearances.

There are two drawings on pages very close to one another in which Zóbel makes use of a type of drawing of pictorial character. There is in the first one backlighting and a figure sitting on its heels (p. 73) (fig. 9), and in the second one a girl wearing a kimono who seems to be entering the room (p. 78) (fig. 10). In the latter drawing he follows an accentually vertical format, like the models of the engravings *hashira-e*¹⁰ or *kakemono*¹¹ type.

He uses for its execution beams of lines, divided lines, and interwoven lines to interpret the general effect that the composition produces under the conditioning factor of light and shade. The artist uses these strategies because he does not only want to enclose the forms in their contours, because he does not treat the two-dimensionality of the representation, but also to capture the play of lights established in a Japanese interior, where the large curving roofs detain some of the incoming light and the sliding paper walls filter light depending on whether they are open or not. In this case the light effect and space sensation escape from the essence of the representation of the line used in other notes.

The figure sitting on the ground in a Japanese style is presented as a backlighting, which cuts his forms on a geometric background of the open *shoji* that lets us see the clarity of the exterior. We can feel and appreciate the straightness and the calmness, the balance of orthogonality and stillness of the master facing the tools of his ceremony.

This first drawing comes to our mind when his friend Roger Keyes (2005) describes Zóbel's house in Manila:

But the most beautiful room was his library and studio. He had designed it with a wall of glass on one side (I do not remember whether they were glass windows or sliding glass doors) that it looked out into a rectangular area of raked white sand or gravel that was completely surrounded on three sides by a wall of green bamboo. . . . Perhaps the room faced north; the room was always bright from the light reflected from the sand and the bamboos, but direct sunlight never flooded the room. It always seemed calm and cool.

Although Keyes claims that Zóbel had not visited Japan in 1957 and that he learned about Japanese architecture and gardens through books,¹² his draw-



Fig. 9. *Figure sitting on heels.*

Ink/pen/paper. Notebook 11, p. 73



Fig. 10. *Entering the room.*

Ink/pen/paper. Notebook 11, p. 78

ing notebooks demonstrate that he did visit Japan in December 1953 and again in 1956. It was probably this last travel that drove him to reshape his house with the help of architect Leandro Locsin following Japanese models.¹³

What I want to stress is that this backlighting is kept in the drawing not by chance, but rather because it responds to something that really had attracted his attention and aroused his interest to such an extent that he bought publications related to Japanese architecture and gardens. Keyes (*ibid.*) is even more precise when he says: "He particularly liked the geometric prints of Kyoto temples by Kiyoshi Saito." Saito was an artist of Zóbel's time, who always observed with admiration the work by Mondrian. Curiously Mondrian had focused his searches toward the East like Van Gogh did previously.¹⁴ Zóbel thus became very attracted to orthogonality and walls or windows that open to the garden or to the landscape. These features perhaps drew his attention as they contrasted with the more colorful Filipino world, where the play of curves and decorative vividness were given high prominence.

Following this attraction for the play of perpendiculars Zóbel used in his later works the strategy of playing with different grounds and drawing in pencil an orthogonal reticula in the attempt to give a space reference to the represented, which had more evanescent forms. In the presence of his works the viewer has the sensation of being in the penumbra, looking at what is beyond the window.

The character of the drawings and their execution are very different from one page to another, even those that are contiguous. So, for example, between the backlighting previously mentioned and another drawn with ink and paintbrush, we find represented a simple knot (p. 74) apparently made with strips of paper. Zóbel was attracted by its simplicity and cleanness, features that the artist began to make his own and which he represented with synthetic lines and executed calmly.

The *Haniwa* and Filipino Art

Finally I would like to comment on a block of drawings that mix the two typologies of drawings mentioned at the beginning of this essay: one keeps an image for its descriptive interest while the other helps in the analysis and construction of the knowledge of the hidden aspects of art (pp. 112–15). These drawings do not respond to what he observed in the streets but to what interested him on his visit to the Tokyo National Museum: the *haniwa*. Because his interest in Philippine culture was at the base of his search for identity, in the museum he did not pay attention to other objects of art but rather to the *haniwa*.

The *haniwa* are terracotta figures of a funerary character from the Kofun period (250–600 CE). These figures were placed in the entrance and around the tumulus where the deceased noble was buried. This practice, which disappeared with the arrival of Buddhism, was meant to protect the tomb and show the status of the deceased. These figures faced the exterior and were on cylinders in the ground that served as their support. The *haniwa* tackle a wide range of subjects, from varied houses and animals to all kinds of figures with different functions: warriors, dancing people, musicians, falconers, maidens. These sculptural pieces are characterized by the simplicity and naivety of their designs.

Reading Zóbel's article, "Filipino Artistic Expression" (1953), one finds it perfectly understandable why he took more interest in the study of these terracotta pieces and not in the wooden sculptures from the Kamakura pe-



Fig. 11. *Haniwa, warrior*. Ink/pen/paper. Notebook 11, p. 117



Fig. 12. *Haniwa, warrior*. Ink/brush/paper. Notebook 11, p. 125

riod or in the ceramic tea bowls. Those were the years during which Zóbel was immersed in the search for his own identity and, by extension, for Filipino national identity. Thus the subject matter and the color of his paintings were in keeping with what was most recognizably Filipino, and he tried to do erudite research around these local subjects. He started to study thoroughly the genuine features of the artistic expression of the Filipino people. He studied remnants from the oldest cultural artifacts, but these were scarce because of the corrosive climate of the islands and the organic character of the materials. Zóbel (1953, 128) valued the “expressive impact” of the idols that have survived to his day; subsequently, guided by the same interest, he would study the silver ExVotos in the Ilocos (Zóbel 1957, 261–67). Thus, his keen observation of the Japanese haniwa as evidence of the oldest Japanese creations, those in which he tracked the peculiarly expressive characteristics of “the Japanese,” paralleled his own search for and researches on “the Filipino.”

On the first page where he mentions these pieces (p. 112) he works to simplify the faces of the terracotta figures; their eyes and mouth are simple incisions in the clay and show the darkness of their cavity. There are four rectangular-shaped faces. On the following page the reference to the haniwa becomes explicit. There are two sketches of the same head in which Zóbel attempts to define the forms and the volume of the figure with quick strokes of multiple lines.

The drawing that follows is the figure of a warrior dressed in armor (p. 114). Zóbel noticeably tries to give life to these figures through his interpretation: he removes the cylinder base and enlarges its corpulence, drawing our attention to the trappings of the armor, the arrows of the warrior sticking out above his shoulders from the quiver, and the complex helmet. All these are carefully presented in a way similar to what he did with the bicycle. It is easy to verify his particular interpretation of the subject if we compare the haniwa in the Tokyo National Museum¹⁵ with the drawing of the warrior on page 115, which is very faithful to the model as can be appreciated through the quick lines, multiple and corrected, which are to be expected when one makes a sketch of a subject for the first time.

A hefty new warrior is reinterpreted (p. 117) (fig. 11). He is wearing a helmet with horns, quiver with arrows on his back, and the characteristic protection of the *keiko* armor.¹⁶ Zóbel composes his own image of the armors of these warriors from antiquity. He enlarges the corpulence of the terracotta figure with narrow shoulders and a thin waist. The drawing highlights the

cavity between the figure's face and the helmet in such a way as if it were a mask, and the dark filling of the forms highlights certain details of the figure that go unnoticed in the haniwa, but their existence reveals to Zóbel the interest in the care of the most minute details of "the Japanese." On the last pages of this "Japanese section" of the notebook, there is also a warrior's bust made with paintbrush and ink in which Zóbel does not work with the gouache but only lines the forms with a thick paintbrush (p.125) (fig. 12). Probably he drew it by heart based on what he had learned in the previous ones, thanks to the line.

On page 119 the simplicity of a face is schemed on the haniwa head of a young girl with a large part of her hair missing (fig. 13).¹⁷ Perhaps if today we could observe her as she was, the attraction would be less because, as with other masterpieces in the history of art, the course of time has put the finishing touches and eliminated the superfluous. It is a very simple drawing in which the forms lean on the volume of the shading elaborated with lines. Zóbel made two drawings of this head on the same page. What seems to attract him is the expressivity of the face with just a few features.

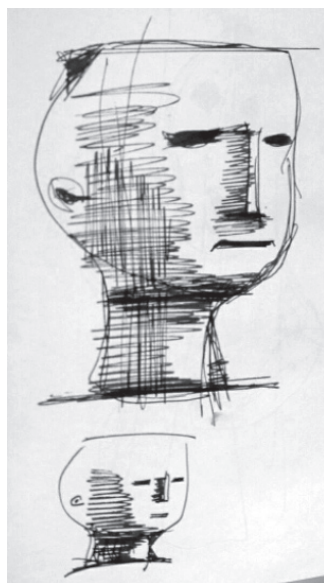


Fig. 13. *Haniwa, young girl*. Ink/pen/paper. Notebook 11, p. 119



Fig. 14. *Haniwa, woman and man with arms in dance rhythm*. Ink/brush/paper. Notebook 11, p. 123



Fig. 15. *Related to haniwa*. Ink/brush/paper. Notebook 11, p. 122



Fig. 16. *Haniwa, horse*. Ink/pen/paper. Notebook 11, p. 121

Among the haniwa representing humans found in the Tokyo National Museum, he analyzed a pair of very well-known figures from the sixth century: the *Dancing People* or *Woman and Man with Arms in Dance Rhythm*.¹⁸ He first observed the woman and drew her image with lines in his mind (p. 120) (fig. 14), and then he executed the man using the ink gouache (p. 123). In both cases attention is drawn to the abstraction of the human figures, their simplicity, and the expressivity of the forms to which they refer.

A more elaborate drawing with Indian ink and paintbrush linked to this group of human haniwa is difficult to identify with a concrete model because it seems that Zóbel had already absorbed what he wanted from them: the expressivity of the simplicity. The head is a circle and some simple strokes make us imagine the small and disproportionate arms of these terracotta figures (p. 122) (fig. 15).

We have previously mentioned that there are also animal figures among the haniwa. Zóbel observed them attentively, describing the haniwa of a cock or a hen (p. 118)¹⁹ and a horse (p. 121)²⁰ (fig. 16). Both are drawings made with quick lines. The horse—a delicate calligraphy that is

very simple and clear—was reproduced in the first book of Zóbel's (1954, 77) drawings.

It is important to note how the interest that these pieces aroused in Zóbel seems to have been linked to the fact that he saw in them creations that possessed the soul of the people who created them, the very reason why they are kept alive today. They tell us about their creators, their living force, and their customs. In a way they constitute a repertoire of images from the past similar and parallel to what Zóbel had tried to gather in his notes from previous pages—ambulant sellers, travelers, mothers, cyclists, street life, everyday life, autochthonous subjects—linking with his interest in the expressions of the cultural identity of a people.

The Japanese subject in this notebook comes to an end with the cutting of the illustration of a painting by Genichiro Inokuma (1903–1993) entitled “Chats et Oiseaux,” which is found on page 201.²¹ On the right side are birds eating fish with their long beaks and on the left side three cats are watching them. The lining up of the animals totally cancels out the perspective, and Zóbel tries to place one on top of the other to give depth to the space in a primitive way. They are the same broken spaces used by Matisse, which attracted Zóbel at that time. We should mention that Inokuma was in Paris from 1938 to 1940 and had the opportunity to meet Matisse from whom he received advice and direction. In 1955 he went to New York where he stayed for twenty years during which time he associated with famous artists such as Isamu Noguchi, John Cage, Robert Rauschenberg, Mark Rothko, and Jasper Johns.

It seems that Zóbel met Inokuma during his first visit to Japan in 1953, when Inokuma gained recognition for his work, having made in 1951 some public works and won the II Mainichi Contest of Art with a wall painting. It could be that the male portrait on page 81 was Inokuma because he was well known for his thick black eyebrows.²² Inokuma's works are bright paintings of flat and intense colors with two-dimensional spaces and figures to which Zóbel must have felt close.

The oil works from the beginning of the 1950s accorded with the style of the photograph cutting that Zóbel stuck in his notebook, and the birds are identified with the crows that prowled the parks of the town.

These forms by the Japanese painter have a lot in common with the haniwa that Zóbel had represented. Curiously Inokuma produced a painting entitled *Haniwa I*²³ that supports even more the idea of such affinity.

The Tokyo National Museum has a great variety of pieces: sculptures of Buddha with different features, iconographies, and periods; different kinds

of fabrics; ceramics from the enamel porcelains to the *raku* bowls, folding screens, and ink paintings. However, Zóbel fixed his eye on these simple and rustic terracotta sculptures because their attractiveness coincided with his own search and interest at that moment: ingenuity in the treatment of the forms and, as we have already reiterated, origins and cultural identity marks.

Conclusion

Through the style used in this notebook we can deduce that Zóbel uses the purest lineal drawing when he tries to communicate, when he gathers what draws his attention from his point of view, decorating or not doing so to strengthen the composition, or to synthesize it to the utmost. However, when there is an interest that goes beyond what is described, arousing his view as an artist, he makes use of the strokes of light and shade through the tracing. Occasionally they are simple touches, as in the case of the haniwa people dancing or of the hen where the contour drawing continues to be the main thing, but in other cases as in the backlighting of the sitting figure the play of light and darkness commands all the attention. Whether through one or several, he evidences with quick strokes his first steps in this artistic path that had just begun and how in those moments he starts to face what is or must be his personal and artistic identity.

So we contemplate his notebooks as secret diaries of his career as an artist. They are full of reflections, of life, of confessions, of aesthetic experiences, and of data, as in the case of his first stay in Japan not mentioned in any of his biographies until now.

Notes

- 1 Born in London, educated in Charterhouse School and Merton College in Oxford, Beerbohm belonged to Oscar Wilde's circle. His most well-known works are *A Christmas Garland* (1912), a parody of the literary styles, and *Seven Men* (1919), which includes *Enoch Soames*, the tale of a poet who makes a pact with the devil to know how posterity will remember him (Hart-Davis 1972). His collections of caricatures are published as books or in daily newspapers. According to the author his best caricatural production was before 1930, as he said, after his coolness and ingenuity had ended. We could mention among the collections *Caricatures of Twenty-Five Gentlemen* (1922), *The Poet's Corner* (1904), *Rossetti and His Circle* (1922), and *Things New and Old* (1923).
- 2 Ma. Ángeles Villalba Salvador (1991) has been the first and until now I think the only one studying and cataloging all of Zóbel's notebooks that are kept in the Museo de Arte Abstracto Español de

Cuenca. As a first approximation to the subject, Villalba's work lacks some precision, which I think I can make through this essay because I am interested in subjects that deal with the artistic relations between East Asia and the West. See also Lorenzo 1998 for a rare article on Zóbel's drawings.

- 3 I have not found any testimony or document about the personal feeling of Zóbel about Japan and the Japanese people. Although the memory of the war must have been fresh in his mind in the early 1950s, I think art was for him one of the more important things, and appreciation of beauty was a stronger feeling than hate for the enemy.
- 4 The patterns of the fabrics and the style of the woman's clothes suggest that Zóbel could have moved to Okinawa.
- 5 Dated 21 December 1953.
- 6 Dated 21 December 1953, and in the illustration index he adds that it was made in Tokyo.
- 7 On p. 89 there is another bicycle represented on a full page but not so much attention and care are given to each detail. Also on p. 85 another bicycle and a bowler hat are represented on the upper margin.
- 8 Handkerchief placed around the forehead and tied at the back.
- 9 High social standing clothing of wide pleated trousers and a type of long sleeveless jacket with broad straight shoulders.
- 10 Column type, very narrow and long.
- 11 Sizes of paintings very vertically framed used both in China and Japan for paintings and calligraphies as well as engravings.
- 12 Keyes 2005 writes: "Fernando had not visited Japan at that time, but he knew about Japanese architecture and gardens from books. He showed me a book of beautiful photographs of Katsura Villa and Oliver Statler's new book, *Modern Japanese Prints: An Art Reborn* (1956)."
- 13 "You may remember the little windows in the library at the museum in Cuenca that framed parts of the landscape. Fernando already had windows like that in his first library in Manila, and I think they were inspired by photos and prints of Kyoto architecture" (Keyes 2005).
- 14 I would like to draw attention to the discovery in others that is common to us, in this case the proximity to Kiyoshi Saito who unconsciously found affinity between Mondrian and the Japanese world.
- 15 A figure dug up in the town of Ota in Gunma Prefecture. It can be seen on the Tokyo National Museum webpage (http://www.tnm.go.jp/en/servlet/Con?processId=00&ref=2&Q1=&Q2=&Q3=&Q4=_____1_12_&Q5=&F1=&F2=&pageId=E15&colid=J36697). It is very similar to another one from the Aikawa Archeologic Museum, also from the Gunma Prefecture, reproduced in Kidder 1985, 29.
- 16 Model of armor that came from China and Korea which protections were elaborated with small metallic pieces joined together with leather strips.
- 17 16.5 cm., Tokyo National Museum. Image reproduced as pictures 14–15 in Kidder 1964, 26. This drawing by Zóbel was published as picture 76 in Zóbel 1954.
- 18 64 x 57 cm., Tokyo National Museum. Image reproduced as picture 10 in Kidder 1964, 23. See also <http://www.tnm.go.jp/en/servlet/Con?colid=J21428X&pageId=E15&processId=00&ref=>.
- 19 Height 55 cm., from Goshi, Gunma, Tokyo National Museum. Villalba 1991 identifies it as a duck. Reproduced as picture 29 in Kidder 1964, 34.

20 Height 87.5 cm., from Chujo, Saitama, Tokyo National Museum.

21 On the last page of the notebook is the painter's address: "Genichiro Inokuma, 23, 2-Chome Den-en-Chofu Otaku, Tokyo (72) 4816."

22 Among the works by Genichiro Inokuma in the 1940s there are some oils with Filipino subjects as *Two Maidens* (1942) and *Filipino Children* (1942), which can make us think that he was in the Philippines at the time of the Japanese occupation, as occurred with many other artists of his generation. See http://www.mimoca.org/gallery_e.html.

23 106.4 x 175.8 cm, oil/canvas.

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