

In the article “No ‘Thing to Wear’: A Brief History of Kimono and Inappropriation from Japonisme to Kimono Protests”, Michelle Lie Carriger discusses the 2015 ‘Decolonize Our Museums’ protests regarding the Museum of Fine Art’s *La Japonaise* exhibit. The exhibit included the 1876 Claude Monet painting and a replica of the kimono donned in the painting for viewers to try on. This exhibit sparked outrage, many deeming it racist, and a fine example of appropriation and orientalism. Ultimately, the debates took a very binary, or black and white, path. Carriger’s goal in the essay was to bring nuance to the discussion and to dive into the history of the kimono.

One of the main issues tackled in the article was whether the exhibit was participating in the appropriation or appreciation of Japanese culture. The exact definition of appropriation is one that is difficult to pin down, which is why these debates are sometimes fruitless and Carriger believes the question is not one that can be answered. To me, the line is crossed into appropriation when the object is almost entirely stripped of its original culture. Many modern Western trends begin as appropriation; think acrylic nails and hairstyles from black culture, henna freckles, and even ‘exotic’ facial features and body types. Carriger notes that the kimono is still distinctively Japanese, so much so that Monet’s wife wearing one deems her worthy of the title “the Japanese.” The painting itself, *La Japonaise*, is much more oriental and laughably racist to me, rather than appropriation. Appropriation implies that one is taking something from another culture and claiming it as their own. This painting depicts a white woman, emphasizing her whiteness with a blonde wig, wearing a kimono, and claiming to be Japanese. It’s almost a parody in our outlandish it truly is.

One topic Carriger graces is “who speaks for whom” and who owns culture? In many cases, not everyone of a particular culture will agree, bringing up the question of whose input is more valuable and who is ‘right’? Some Japanese and Japanese Americans came forward to say they were not offended by the exhibit, some even going as far as to say it was the protesters who were committing racist actions by, in a sense, gatekeeping culture. A common issue of the modern age is the ‘white savior complex’ and other variations of it. People become so engrossed in the idea of not offending others and protecting a minority culture that they end up inadvertently offending the culture they were trying to protect through silencing them. This seems to have been the case with Decolonize Our Museums, being that neither of the group’s founders came from Japanese descent. I believe they were taking their own feelings about their personal culture and projecting it onto Japanese individuals. They probably knew they would be offended if someone was to do this with their culture, so rather than standing by and letting Japanese critics speak up, they spoke over them. They were emboldened by their own cultural views that their blind pride ended up causing more harm than good, in the case of the #whitesupremacykills hashtag.

My questions for the group are *how do you define and differentiate racism, appropriation, and orientalism* and *where do you think the line is crossed in appropriation vs appreciation?*