

Acknowledgements

This book originated from the interdisciplinary endeavour of two scholars who decided to explore contemporary Japanese material culture from the perspective of sustainability. Our own research interests – waste (Cwiertka) and art (Machotka) – formed the point of departure for this experiment, titled ‘From Garbage to Art: Environmental Consciousness in Japan in the Post-Cold War Era’. The project received generous support from the LeidenAsiaCentre (formerly MEARC) and aimed to explore popular attitudes towards the environment, recycling, and energy conservation, combined with a study of the cultural articulation of a newly emerging consciousness in the visual arts.

In the first instance, we planned to study the eco-art movement – in particular, the process of the artistic recycling of rubbish into art as a way to challenge the existence of the intellectually and socially flat contemporary Japanese culture that has been created by the consumerist agenda. However, since its inception in 2013, the project has undergone continual transformation, largely influenced by the scholars we have met on our journey and the ideas they have shared with us. We are indebted to all of them.

During the inaugural workshop we organized at Leiden University in May 2014 we were joined by Kasuya Akiko, Isabel Hoving, Eiko Maruko Siniawer, Anne Murcott, Helen Westgeest, and Gavin Whitelaw. The second workshop, titled ‘Art with Agenda: Socially Engaged Art Practices in Post-Cold War Japan’, took place in November of the same year. This time, we benefitted from the ideas presented by Gunhild Borggreen, Adrian Favell, Hasegawa Yuko, Hayashi Michio, and Jennifer Robertson. The conference session ‘Rubbish! The Underworlds of Everyday Life’, organized by Cwiertka at the European Association of Japanese Studies (EAJS) Conference in Ljubljana in the summer of 2014, further enriched the scope and depth of our explorations. We are grateful to Sabine Frühstück, Fabio Gygi, Joseph Hankins, Eiko Maruko Siniawer, Anemone Platz, and Brigitte Steger, who participated in this conference panel.

While engaging in conversations on the topic of waste and art with our colleagues, we pursued work on the second pillar of the project – an exhibition that explored contemporary Japanese packaging conventions. Since packaging is both a major source of waste in Japan and an important genre within the domain of Japanese design, it is hardly surprising that this was an area in which our research interests intersected. The exhibition was put on display at three different locations: Japanmuseum Sieboldhuis in Leiden

(10 June 2016-28 August 2016), the Museum of Japanese Art and Technology in Cracow (9 November 2016-28 February 2017), and the Asia and Pacific Museum in Warsaw (30 May 2017-17 September 2017). Additional funding for the exhibition was provided by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO, project number 277-53-006, www.garbagemattersproject.com). The catalogue of the exhibition is available to download from <https://www.cwiertka.com/news/the-catalogue-of-the-exhibition-too-pretty-to-throw-away-packaging-design-from-japan-is-now-available-for-download/>.

Over the course of the three years (2014-2016) of our engagement with this experimental project, we came to the realization, as we explain in the Introduction, that the debate focusing on the relationships between consumption, sustainability, and art may offer a fresh view of the everyday reality in post-bubble Japan. We hope that this volume will provide a useful contribution to the literature, especially as the LeidenAsiaCentre grant has enabled us to publish this book as an Open Access publication.

The diverse intellectual backgrounds of our contributors formed the groundwork for this transdisciplinary volume. We would like to thank all of our contributors for their hard work and patience. As is often the case with edited collections, this one comes out later than originally planned. We are also indebted to the two anonymous reviewers of the manuscript, whose critical remarks were tremendously helpful in sharpening our focus. Finally, we are grateful to Klarijn Anderson-Loven for her superb editorial work. Needless to say, the responsibility for any shortcomings of this volume lies with us.

Katarzyna J. Cwiertka and Ewa Machotka
October 2017