

THE INFLUENCE OF THE 'THE STUDIO' ON KANAE YAMAMOTO: FOUNDER OF SOSAKU HANGA MOVEMENT - CREATIVE PRINTMAKING

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INTRODUCTION

For the following contributions, Yamamoto is regarded as one of the pioneers of the Taisho Democracy, the modernisation movement in Japan.

(1) CREATIVE PRINTS (SOSAKU HANGA)

Kanae Yamamoto was known to have founded Creative Prints in collaboration with other artists. Creative Prints were not produced by a division of labour between the painter, engraver and printer as in traditional Japanese ukiyo-e prints, but by the work of a single artist, from preparatory drawing and plate making to the final print, as self-printing and self-engraving. Yamamoto's woodblock print 'Fisherman' is considered a monumental work of Creative Printmaking. Fig.1)

(2) FREE DRAWING EDUCATION MOVEMENT

In Russia, where Yamamoto stayed for four and a half months at the end of his European studies, he visited an exhibition on children's creative art

and, after his return, proposed a Free Drawing Education Movement for Japanese children. Fig 2). In Japan, until then, children were taught the Ringa method, which required them to copy drawings and figures printed in textbooks. The Free Drawing Education Movement encouraged children to see and feel nature and express themselves freely, relying on their creativity and has continued to the present day.



Figure 1



Figure 2

(3) PEASANT ART MOVEMENT

During his stay in Russia, Yamamoto visited a rural handicrafts exhibition in Moscow, where he was inspired by crafts made by peasants, such as simple wooden dolls. (Yamamoto, 1935). After returning to Japan, he founded the Peasant Art Movement (Fig.3).



Figure 3

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Figure titles and information:

Figure 1: Yamamoto, K. (1904) Gyofu (Fisherman) [woodcut print]. At: Nagano: Ueda City Museum of Art. 40.6 x 36.9 cm
 Figure 2: Kanae Yamamoto teaching Free Drawing at Jiyu Gakuen (1921).
 Figure 3: Koppa Ningyo 'Ina Odori (Wooden Dolls: Ina Dance) of Peasant Art (1920s).

(4) TAISHO DEMOCRACY

Taisho Democracy refers to the movements and historical context in which Japan became more democratic and liberal across many areas, including politics, society and culture, during the Taisho period (1912-1926). The Free Drawing Education Movement and the Peasant Art Movement are considered to be part of the Taisho Democracy.

The Peasant Art Movement and Free Drawing Education Movement initiated by Yamamoto enabled local people living in rural areas to receive an art education on making crafts, lacquerware, prints, and souvenir dolls. They attended courses at the 'Jiyu Daigaku (Free University / University of Liberty)', which provided university-level education. The Taisho Democratic period saw a growing momentum for cultural and artistic activities in the region.

YAMAMOTO'S EARLY TRAINING, STUDIES IN PARIS, AND VISITS TO LONDON

In 1892, Kanae Yamamoto (1882-1946), at the age of 10, began his apprenticeship as a craftsman at the workshop of Sakurai Moku-hanga Kobo, where he trained as a woodblock printmaker. By the age of 19, he had mastered the art of drawing illustrations for commercial commissions with delicate strokes. There, he may have received an early influence of Western-style printmaking. Yamamoto's teacher, Sakurai Gyo-un, studied prints from foreign magazines (Yamamoto 1905) (2002, pp.173-175),

The prints he produced then, including still lives and portraits of wood engraving, still exist (Fig.4). He acquired such excellent skills that he was commissioned to work on wooden engravings for the labels of the famous Japanese beer company, Kirin Brewery Company, which is still operational today (Fig.4). The fine wooden engraving technique was the equivalent of modern photographic techniques before photography came into practice.

He then studied Western painting at the Tokyo Fine Arts School, the predecessor of the Tokyo University of the Arts. The woodblock print 'Fisherman' (1904) depicts light's influence and is more informed by Western painting rather than the Japanese or Ukiyo-e method of drawing using outlines without shadows. The 'Fisherman' symbolises the dawn of Creative Prints, where the artist engraved and printed his prints. (Fig.1)

From 1912-1916, Yamamoto went to Paris to study fine art and printmaking (etching) at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and specialised in printmaking and oil painting (Kanae Yamamoto Memorial Art Museum, 2002, p.173-175; Yamamoto, 1921). He studied Impressionist artists, including Cézanne and Monet, and other art movements, such as Cubism and Futurism. However, Yamamoto could never establish an original style of his art that he found satisfying. He described how he struggled to contribute to Impressionist art in France, saying his results were poor (Kosaki, 1979) (Yamamoto, 1935) (Fujishiro, 2007). In his book



Figure 4

Figure 4: Wood engraving for the portrait of Count Teashima and Kirin Brewery Company labels etc. (around 1893).

'The Yawn of an Artist', Yamamoto indicated his hesitation towards fine art, saying that 'miracles do not happen' (Yamamoto, 1921). However, he was more interested in realism (Yamamoto, 1935) and described how he wanted to 'emerge from emotion' when he painted (Yamamoto, 1908). His belief in realism is thought to have led to his interest in Free Drawing Education, which focuses on children's creativity in depicting the reality of nature as they see and perceive it. In an interview, he said, "What I directly feel is precious. Various forces (work) must be born from it" (Yamamoto, 1928). These words are often interpreted as indicative of his spirit.

While in Paris, Yamamoto visited the UK twice: in 1914, when the First World War began, and the French government moved from Paris to Bordeaux. on the 3rd of September, he took refuge in London, but whilst there, he suffered from tuberculosis (Yamakoshi, 1971, 2002, pp.173-175) (Yamamoto, 1921). Yamamoto met Auguste Rodin and returned to Paris on 11 January 1915. For a second trip in 1916, he received permission to travel to London on 8 July before going to Moscow on his return journey. He may have purchased *The Studio* while in England and brought it back with him to Japan.

THE INFLUENCE OF WILLIAM NICHOLSON AND WILLIAM MORRIS ON YAMAMOTO

During his studies on Western painting in Japan, Yamamoto was influenced by European artists, and rather than following traditional Japanese techniques and culture, was especially interested in William Nicholson's style of woodblock, describing it as 'Toga' an engraving with knives' picture - or 'self-engraving'. (Yamamoto, 1907)

'Self-engraving woodblock prints have long been practised in Europe, and William Nicholson has produced a new kind of self-engraving print. I found Nicholson's prints to be a very simple technique, and they are very good as a pastime for people with some background in Western art, but I also think that people without a background in painting can easily engrave by selecting a picturesque photograph and transferring it to a board. So I hope that the advantages of Western woodblock prints will be developed and that fine art prints will flourish in the future.'" (Yamamoto, 1906).

Morris and Ruskin, who founded the UK Arts & Crafts Movement, visited Japan in the late 1880s. In 1891, the novelist Tamotsu Shibue introduced Morris as a poet, and in 1899, Murai Tomoyoshi introduced Ruskin and Morris as socialists. As for art, in 1912, Kenkichi Tomimoto's biography 'The Story of William Morris' described him as a designer, and in 1915, Toru Iwamura contributed to an article entitled 'William Morris and Aesthetic Socialism'. Iwamura spent 1888 to 1892 in Europe and the USA studying painting and art history, and it has been reported that Yamamoto, who studied in the West from 1912 to 1916, was influenced by Morris (Izumo, 2006).

Yamamoto described the similarities between the Russian influence on



Figure 5

Figure 5: Discovered journals, *The Studio*.

his Peasant Art Movement and Morris's Arts and crafts ideas. A special issue of *The Studio* (French edition) on Russian art was found in one of his collections of journals. It contains advertisements for Peasant Art in Russia by Liberty & Co. (Fig.6), suggesting that Yamamoto was aware of the value of Russian art and Peasant Art before he visited Russia (Kanae Yamamoto Memorial Art Museum, 2002, p.173-175) (Yamamoto, 1921).



Figure 6

THE INFLUENCE OF THE STUDIO ON YAMAMOTO

The official name of the magazine is *The Studio: An Illustrated Magazine of Fine and Applied Art*. Published in London between 1893 and 1964, it was mainly influenced by the Art Nouveau and Arts and Crafts movements of fine and decorative arts and a fusion of Fine Art and Applied Art, which is reflected in the magazine's contents.

For example, issue VOL.44 (1908) was dedicated to features on The Etchings of Dr Otto Gampert, Japanese Colour Prints, and The National Competition. Art School Notes also included a section on the International Drawing Exhibition and the Royal College of Art. Meanwhile, Studio Talk features Applied Art - Hungarian textiles and Ruskin pottery. Similarly, VOL 46 (1909) featured Old Danish Carved Furniture and Artists of the Royal Academy, including J.W. Waterhouse.

During his study in Paris (1912-1916), it was likely that Yamamoto came across *The Studio* (Fig. 5) during his travels between London and Paris. The *Studio* was also published in Paris, with the only difference being that the spine and part of the front cover were printed in French, with an insert consisting of a French translation of the text of the article and various French advertisements.

One of the journals contained a special issue on Russian peasant art, and the French title suggests it was published in France. At the same time, the French magazine *L'ART DECORATIF* was also discovered.

- 1) VOL.44 No.186 SEPT 15. 1908
- 2) VOL.46 No.193 APRIL 15. 1909
- 3) VOL.50 No.210 SEPT 15. 1910
- 4) VOL.52 No.218 MAY 15. 1911
- 5) L'ART RUSTIQUE EN RUSSIE

NUMERO SPECIAL DU STUDIO AUTOMNE 1912

'Rustic art of the Russia, special issue of Studio Autumn 1912' (French edition)

Another journal found at the same time:

- 6) L'ART DECORATIF (French)

Susumu Watanabe (1900-1960) was a designer and design manager at the Japan Peasant Art Institute in Ueda, with Yamamoto and others. The *Studio* was donated to the Ueda City Museum of Art by the Watanabe family. The *Studio* VOL. 44 and 46 have the inscriptions 'Japan Peasant Art Institute' and 'Tamao Collection' (Tamao is Susumu's son), which confirms that it was in the Japan Peasant Art Institute

Figure 6: Advertisements for Peasant Art in Russia by Liberty & Co. on the front cover of *The Studio*, French edition (1912).

collection, which Kanae Yamamoto founded.

The Studio (French edition) L'ART RUSTIQUE EN RUSSIE NUMERO SPECIAL DU STUDIO AUTOMNE 1912 (Russian Rustic Art: Studio Autumn 1912 Special) appears to have been published in France. This special issue may have inspired Yamamoto to explore Russian peasant art further and visit Russia, where he gained more experience by seeing children's and peasants' works. Yamamoto has often referred to the Russian influence on his work, and the value of the children's drawings and peasant-made craft dolls he saw in Moscow 'could not be seen or noticed in Paris (Yamamoto, 1935)'.

Yamamoto created wooden carved furniture after returning to Japan, using Russian furniture as a reference. A note ('with leather cushion'), possibly written by Yamamoto, was tucked into the page of the photograph.

Further impact led to Yamamoto expanding his activities as a printmaker and artist in the Peasant Art Movement and the Free Drawing Education Movement for children and leaving his name as a social activist through art dedicated to the Taisho Democracy Movement in Japan.

The examples of Arts and Crafts in The Studio might have motivated Yamamoto to move from fine art to applied art practice, particularly the ideas presented by William Morris, and realise the ideals of creative crafts practice. According to Izumo, Morris's poetics works were first introduced in Japan in 1891, and whilst studying in Paris (1912-1916) and during his brief visit to London (3rd September 1914 to 11th January 1915) to escape the fires of the First World War, Yamamoto may well have come across Morris' artworks and designs, and the so-called Arts and Crafts Movement.

He states that Morris intended to bring spiritual enrichment to the capitalist-entrenched public of the time through art, including Russian Princess Maria Tenisheva, who encouraged peasants to make crafts with the same aim regarding the spirit of art promotion (Yamamoto, 1927). Yamamoto focused not only on peasant art as a commodity but also on its principles and spirituality.

Whereas Morris's target was the relative bourgeoisie, Maria Tenisheva's outreach to Russian peasants is thought to have been closer to Yamamoto's intentions toward Japanese peasants without access to art education. Furthermore, The Studio may have triggered a more profound understanding of Yamamoto's exploration of the spirituality of Russian peasant art. In some ways, the Russian Peasant Art Movement may be compared to William Morris's creative movement in the UK. Morris was upset by the miserable lives of modern people, who had become money-grabbing demons and tried to save them with his values in his art. He devoted his private fortune to establishing a design and crafts company in London, creating wallpaper, decorative glass, and bound books. The Talashkino artists dedicated the same sincerity for life to the lives of the rural population.

'Bretonne' (1920) is known as one of Yamamoto's representative prints after his study abroad.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF YAMAMOTO: FROM PRINTMAKER TO ACTIVIST

When Yamamoto went to Paris to study art, it appears that although he had already gained a reputation as a printmaker in Japan, his results at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris were not good enough, and he felt limited as an artist. Whilst it is known that he met the artist Rodin during his stay in London, little information is available as to his other activities. However, it is possible that these difficulties enabled him to subsequently turn into a social activist of historical significance.

On his return to Japan, Yamamoto expanded his role from printmaker to social activist of the Peasant Art Movement and the Free Drawing Education Movement. His work is regarded as having contributed to the modernisation of Japan as the Taisho Democracy. What is valued in his achievements is his philosophy as well as his productions. For Yamamoto, a printmaker who worked with wood in woodblock prints, techniques of wooden crafts might have been close to him. However, The Studio did not just let him explore Russian crafts but also an ideological background, such as the Arts and Crafts Movement in the UK. The Studio might have contributed to the transition of his ideas.

He lived in a time of art movements, art-enlightenment and social movements. For example, the Peasant Art Movement has similarities with the Bauhaus School, which Arts and Crafts also influenced. Yamamoto's Peasant Art Practice School, later Japan Peasant Art Institute, was founded in 1919, the same year as the Bauhaus. (The Bauhaus was disbanded by the Nazis in 1933, and the Peasant Art Institute closed in 1940 for economic reasons).

Just as Bauhaus emphasised academic and interdisciplinary activities, the institute connected with and supported each other with local influential figures such as Tadashi Kanai and Osamu Yamakoshi, who established the Shinano (Ueda) Free University, which invited university teachers to give lectures on philosophy, literature, ethics, psychology, and sociology.

They organised and financially supported Yamamoto's lecture 'On the Encouragement of Free Drawing for Children' on his return from the West, which was the start of Yamamoto's Free Drawing Movement for Children and the Peasant Art Movement.

Like the Bauhaus, the Peasant Art Institute also taught printmaking. Incidentally, Mitsuko Yamamuro, who created the Crafts Institute at the Jiyu Gakuen, where Yamamoto conducted his Free Drawing Education Movement, was instructed by Johannes Itten of the Bauhaus in 1932.

Nowadays, it is not unusual for artists to engage in social activities. Yamamoto was trained as a craftsman in printmaking, then received an art education and studied art in the West.



Figure 7

Figure 7: Yamamoto, K. (1920) Bretonne [woodcut print]. At: Nagano: Ueda City Museum of Art. 36.3×28.4 cm

While feeling limited as an artist, he continued his studies and realised from his own experience that what he directly felt was precious. Through the art and culture of other countries, he opened up his own culture and decided to contribute as a social activist.

KANAE YAMAMOTO'S INFLUENCE AND LEGACY

Yamamoto studied at the Tokyo Art School under Seiki Kuroda, whom the Impressionists influenced. In France, where he studied, he intended to study printmaking, but as Yamamoto saw Japonism, his interest shifted to oil painting, and he was impressed by Cézanne and Van Gogh. The print *Bretonne* (Fig. 7), which Yamamoto produced after his studies in France, is brighter and more concise in style than *Fisherman*, which Yamamoto made before his studies in the West. In London, where he was evacuated, he met Rodin. Because of his thoroughgoing pursuit of realism, he did not embrace Futurism, Cubism, or abstraction, which were then advancing in the West.

Kanae Yamamoto was influenced by interdisciplinary fields such as literature. For example, *Myojo*, organised by Yosano Tekkan and aiming for innovation in art and literature of the time, published his print *Fisherman* and started Yamamoto as a printmaker. C. Cuccio wrote that *Myojo* was based on individualism and diversity, featuring various images of people from fishermen to artists and workers to the upper classes. She stated that it combines Japanese agrarian mythology with Wordsworth's romantic rusticity, Tolstoy's endorsement of peasant life, Ruskin and Morris's popularisation of pleasure in labour against the tide of industrial society and 'Art of the People—Art and Life'. (Cuccio, 2005). He was also involved in the launch of the art and literature magazine *Housun*. He had contact with the well-known writer and poet Hakushu Kitahara, whom he met at the young artists' association 'Pan no Kai (Pan's Party)' and married his sister. Yamamoto met Tolstoy's widow during his stay in Russia.

His artistic and art education orientation can be attributed to the influence of the Renaissance liberal arts. He quoted Leonardo da Vinci, who said painters must never imitate other painters. If the artists do so, they must say that they are not children of nature but grandchildren', and stress the importance of actually seeing and painting (Yamamoto, 1921). He further stated that 'art education requires wisdom and skill in production, and aesthetic and art historical reflection in appreciation, and that the four are found on freedom based on art education' and that Leonardo da Vinci, Rodin, Cézanne and Renoir said the same. The only difference between physics, mathematics, music, and ethics is that there is a difference between primary school children and specialists in terms of depth and breadth, and art is the same for children and specialists' (Yamamoto, 1921), while at the same time respecting children's learning, he also equates science and art.

He also discussed that 'art education is the instruction that processes imagination with love' (Yamamoto, 1921) and quotes Tolstoy's words

'Learn the way of man from the child, the child is not yet defiled, to them all people are the same' and then 'I am amazed at the vivid imagination of the child. We need an education that draws them out, rather than pushing them in as before' (Ibid.). Yamamoto's attitude of respecting the child might be in common with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's philosophy.

This idea of the child as an ideal being appears to be a more metaphysical perspective than that of printmaker Ota Koji, who was influenced by him and educated children as a teacher. The school prints promoted by Yamamoto spread throughout the country after the war as the Educational Print Movement promoted by Ota and others. Ota was also influenced by Lu Xun's Modern Woodcut Movement in China and intended for children to grow as individuals and participate in a group. (Machimura, 2022). Compared to Yamamoto, who drew out children's imagination and had them draw their everyday lives, Ota used prints as a means for children to face the harsh 'realism rooted in life' of post-war Japan, to look at themselves and society, and to overcome social contradictions. (Ogasawara, 2022)

Yamamoto exerted influence on both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, although he is considered to have been neutral and instead denied a political impact. Unlike Kenji Suzuki and Koji Ota, who were influenced by Chinese prints and politically active, he ultimately rejected being misinterpreted as a communist. The Jiyu Gakuen, the first school for Yamamoto to practise Free Drawing Education, was relatively for children of the bourgeoisie and is considered a suitable environment for him to deepen his art philosophy genuinely. The Peasant Art Movement, on the other hand, aimed to enrich peasants through art and, at the same time, bring them economic wealth by making crafts as a sideline. However, peasant art differs from the proletariat as conceived by Suzuki and Ota, who appealed directly to the so-called suffering of poverty. Peasant artworks were purposefully designed and made to be sold in the high-class department store Mitsukoshi, just as Russian crafts or everyday items designed by Morris were sold in the Liberty store in London.

Yamamoto advocated *Sosaku Hanga* (Creative Prints), which emphasised the individual artist's creativity. He also intended those prints, regarded lowly as secondary to oil paintings, to be treated equally with painting. Creative Printmaking spread in educational settings nationwide under the influence of Yamamoto, who had links with schools through the Free Drawing Movement.

The significance of *Sosaku Hanga* (Creative Prints) today may be due to its accessibility to the general public at relatively low prices. The amateur enjoyment of making prints again that had once been learned at school, and the value of making prints from a draft and learning the pleasure of handwork will remain unchanged in the future in the field of school education, where AI and digital education are progressing. The spread of printmaking to the public as a part of our culture in an increasingly internationalised Japanese society can also be said to be an impact brought about by the *Sosaku Hanga* (Creative Prints)

Movement. All of this can be stated to be what Kanae Yamamoto intended 100 years ago. His thoughts have influenced the Taisho Democracy, printmaking movements, and art education in Japan to this day.

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Supervised book:

'Hajimemashite Nomin Bijutsu -Koppa Ningyo, Kibori, Senshoku, Shisyu' (Nice to Meet You, Peasant Art -wooden dolls, wood carvings, dyeing and embroidery), 2022, Graphic-sha, Tokyo, Japanese-language resource.

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IMAGE GALLERY



Figure titles and information

Figure 1: Yamamoto, K. (1904) Gyofu (Fisherman) [woodcut print]. At: Nagano: Ueda City Museum of Art. 40.6 x 36.9 cm

Figure 2: Kanae Yamamoto teaching Free Drawing at Jiyu Gakuen (1921).



Figure 3: Koppa Ningyo 'Ina Odori (Wooden Dolls: Ina Dance) of Peasant Art (1920s).

Figure 4: Wood engraving for the portrait of Count Terashima and Kirin Brewery Company labels etc. (around 1893).

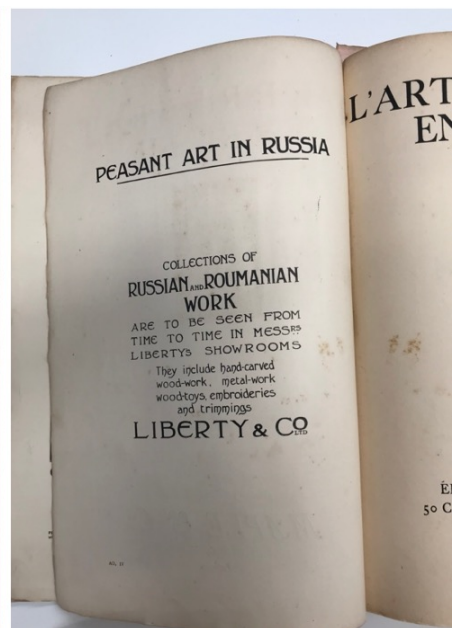
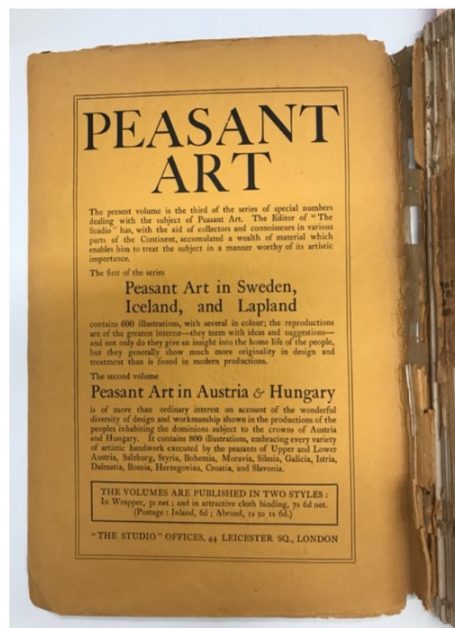
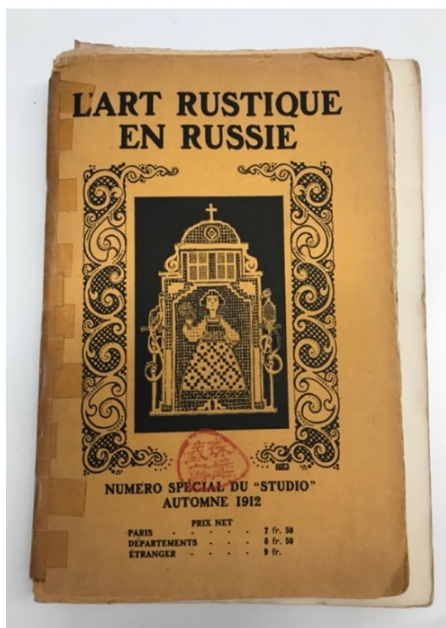
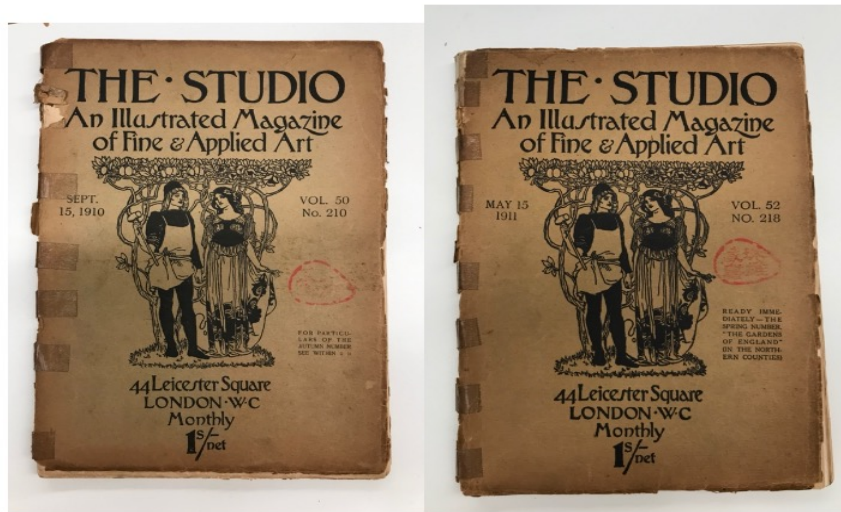
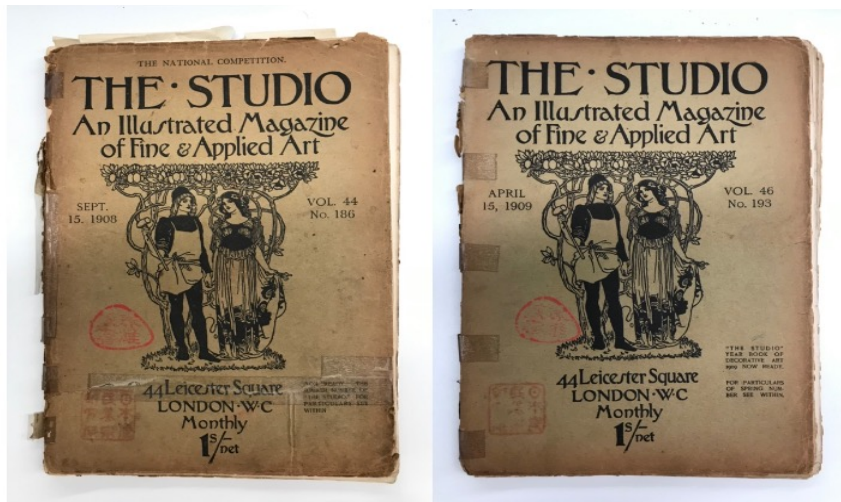


Figure 5: Discovered journals, The Studio.

Figure 6: Advertisements for Peasant Art in Russia by Liberty & Co. on the front cover of The Studio, French edition (1912).



Figure 7: Yamamoto, K. (1920) Bretonne [woodcut print]. At: Nagano: Ueda City Museum of Art. 36.3×28.4 cm