



Alfred H. Maurer  
American, 1868 - 1932

## *Young Woman in Kimono*

c. 1901

oil on canvas

overall: 76.2 × 73.18 cm (30 × 28 13/16 in.)

framed: 87 × 82.87 × 5.4 cm (34 1/4 × 32 5/8 × 2 1/8 in.)

Inscription: lower right: Alfred H. Maurer

Corcoran Collection (Gift of Edith Newlands Johnston and Janet Newlands Johnston) 2014.136.70

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### ENTRY

*Young Woman in Kimono* marks a significant moment in the evolution of Alfred Maurer's bold, modern style. Settling in Paris after briefly studying at the Académie Julian in 1897, Maurer quickly shed his renditions of breezy women in the manner of fellow American illustrator Charles Dana Gibson (American, 1867 - 1944) and began to explore the subjects that had gained currency in the French capital—refined interiors of women amid decorative objects and genre scenes of cafés, dance halls, and other urban venues. Bolstered by this initial period of experimentation with vastly different pictorial languages, for the rest of his career Maurer created a diverse body of work, all inflected with a decidedly European quality, ranging from colorful, thrashing landscapes made after seeing the fauves in the 1905 Salon d'Automne to expressionist portraits of the mid-1920s and synthetic cubist still lifes in the later part of his oeuvre [fig. 1]. *Young Woman in Kimono*, along with the other paintings he made around the turn of the century, reveals an increasingly confident Maurer, an American artist who was beginning to embrace European modernism. [1]

Here Maurer features an elegant woman shown in profile and swathed in a sumptuous kimono, one hand resting on the back of a wooden chair, the other holding a partially opened fan, the folds of which visually echo and thereby link her long red neckband and the textile draped on the table next to her. [2] One of the most striking aspects of the painting is Maurer's use of bright red—in the trim of the gown and the tablecloth's border—which glows against the dark palette used throughout the rest of the canvas. The vivid color also unifies the disparate

elements of the painting both visually and thematically. The same red used to lead our eye around the figure and tablecloth is carried into the Japanese print above the table with its dab of crimson by the wrestler's leg. With this move, Maurer announced that Japanese prints provided the visual precedent and inspiration for his painting.

Indeed, with its shallow space, decorative patterning, and display of Japanese objects, *Young Woman in Kimono* evinces Maurer's fascination with *japonisme*, the interest in all things Japanese. [3] *Japonisme* became the fashion in Europe following the 1867 Exposition Universelle in Paris and peaked in the United States in the 1880s and 1890s at such venues as the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. During this period, American collectors, spurred by connoisseurs such as Ernest Fenolosa, were eagerly amassing their own holdings of Japanese decorative objects and art. At the same time, Japanese prints were being widely circulated in European and American markets, and their availability allowed many artists to emulate the compositional techniques of Japanese printmakers. Maurer, too, was inspired and painted several other works imbued with Japanese influences in addition to the Corcoran painting: his breakthrough picture, *An Arrangement* (1901, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York), which won the coveted first prize in the Sixth Annual Carnegie International competition, and *The Peacock (Portrait of a Woman)* (c. 1903, Philadelphia Museum of Art), which shows a woman in a kimono seated on the floor next to pieces of pottery.

Throughout his career, Maurer was more interested in exploring formal problems of color and composition than in creating compelling narratives, and this is readily seen in *Young Woman in Kimono*. Instead of adding anecdotal details and creating a persona for the model, Maurer emphasized the purely visual, aesthetic aspects of the painting—the use of diagonals, asymmetry, and contrasting colors. This emphasis on beauty and decoration over subject matter suggests Maurer's interest in aestheticism, an artistic movement encapsulated by the mantra “art for art's sake” and most famously advocated by the American expatriate artist James McNeill Whistler (American, 1834 - 1903). Most notably in the full-length pose and pensive mood of the model, *Young Woman in Kimono* owes much to Whistler and aestheticism.

Before his career as a painter, Maurer trained as a lithographer in New Jersey and took a few classes at the National Academy of Design. Maurer's father, Louis Maurer (American, born Germany, 1832 - 1932)—a pupil of William Merritt Chase (American, 1849 - 1916)—was a well-known printmaker for Currier & Ives. Yet after a

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few years working as a commercial artist, Maurer left New York for Paris to learn the academic method. [4] Often seen walking the streets with paintbrush and palette in hand, Maurer quickly became enmeshed in the artistic community in Paris, becoming friends with Leo and Gertrude Stein and participating in their salon of artists, writers, and other intellectuals. [5] With the exception of a few visits to New York, he lived there for the next seventeen years. The political turmoil leading up to World War I caused Maurer to return to the United States in 1914. Thus, for a significant portion of his artistic career, Maurer was an expatriate. Despite later successes, including exhibiting at such landmark venues of modernism as Alfred Stieglitz's 291 gallery and the 1913 Armory Show in New York, Maurer's life ended tragically; he took his own life in New York in 1932, just two weeks after his father's death. Over a decade later, in 1949, the Whitney Museum of American Art honored the late artist with a retrospective exhibition.

Asma Naeem

July 24, 2024

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## COMPARATIVE FIGURES



**fig. 1** Alfred H. Maurer, *Abstract Heads*, c. 1931, unidentified media on fabric mounted on panel, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Corcoran Collection (Museum Purchase, William A. Clark Fund), 2014.136.136

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## NOTES

- [1] Though *Young Woman in Kimono* is not dated, scholars consistently have dated the painting to about 1901 owing to its style and subject matter. Similar works, such as *Woman with Pottery* (Myron Kunin Collection of American Art, Minneapolis) and *An Arrangement* (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York), were painted about 1901. See Stacey Beth Epstein, “Alfred H. Maurer: Aestheticism to Modernism, 1897–1916” (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2003), 45–46.
- [2] The name of the woman posing in *Young Woman in Kimono* is unknown,

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but she may have lived in Montparnasse, the section of Paris where Maurer was known to search for models; Stacey Beth Epstein, “Alfred H. Maurer: Aestheticism to Modernism, 1897–1916” (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2003), 56. Further, Maurer was known to take photographs of his models for use in the studio; Elizabeth McCausland, *A. H. Maurer* (New York, 1951), 69.

- [3] The term *japonisme* was first used in 1872 by the French critic Philippe Burty. See Phillip Dennis Cate, William R. Johnston, and Gabriel P. Weisberg, *Japonisme: Japanese Influence on French Art* (Cleveland, 1975), xi.
- [4] For more information on the academic method and American artists in Paris, see H. Barbara Weinberg, *The Lure of Paris: Nineteenth-Century American Painters and Their French Teachers* (New York, 1991).
- [5] Nick Madormo, “The Early Career of Alfred Maurer: Paintings of Popular Entertainments,” *American Art Journal* 15, no. 1 (Winter 1983): 21.
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### TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The painting is executed on a medium-weight, plain-weave canvas that has many large slubs and other irregularities. It was stretched before the artist applied a very thin, light-gray ground, evidenced by prominent cusping around all four turnover edges. The tacking margins are intact. The painting was lined in 1980 to linen with a fibermat interleaf using a wax/resin adhesive and was stretched onto a new expansion bolt stretcher. The paint was applied freely in a series of thin layers that were often blended wet into wet. In the hands and face, smaller brushes were utilized and the paint was defined and blended with great precision, whereas the thick, juicy dabs of bright color along the lower hem of the kimono were applied with great flourish. There are no apparent artist’s changes except for a very faint, mostly illegible signature painted out in the upper-right corner.

The paint is generally in excellent condition with only a few small areas of retouching in the lower-right quadrant. There are also two small spots of inpainting in the sitter’s face to correct some unevenness. The painting was cleaned of its old varnish at the time of the lining in 1980. The current varnish layer of medium gloss consists of one synthetic varnish applied prior to retouching followed by a different synthetic layer afterward.

Michael Swicklik

July 24, 2024

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## PROVENANCE

Probably by descent in the family of Francis G. Newlands [1846-1917], Washington; his daughters, Edith Newlands Johnston [1876-1965, Mrs. Charles Haven Johnston], and Janet Newlands Johnston [1878-1963, Mrs. William Bernard Johnson], Washington; gift 1950 to Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington; acquired 2014 by the National Gallery of Art.

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## EXHIBITION HISTORY

1908 Possibly A Special Exhibition of Paintings by the French Impressionists and the Works of Six American Artists Residing in Paris, Minneapolis Society of Fine Arts, 1908, no. 91, as *Girl in Brown Kimono*.

1908 Possibly Special Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture by Six American Artists Residing in France, Art Institute of Chicago; Memphis Society of Fine Arts, Detroit Art Museum, 1908, no. 23, as *Girl in Brown Kimono*.

1958 A Retrospective Selection of Oils by Alfred H. Maurer, Bertha Schaefer Gallery, New York, 1958. checklist no. 1.

1973 Alfred H. Maurer, 1868-1932, National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, 1973, no. 3.

1973 Alfred H. Maurer: An American Modernist, University of Minnesota Gallery, Minneapolis, 1973, unpublished checklist.

1985 *Henri's Circle*, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, 20 April-16 June 1985, unnumbered checklist.

1988 *Le Japonisme*, Grand Palais, Paris; National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo, 1988, no. 100.

1995 *At Home with Art: Paintings in American Interiors, 1780-1920*, Katonah Museum of Art, New York, 1995, unnumbered checklist.

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1996 *The Kimono Inspiration: Art and Art-to-Wear in America*, Dixon Gallery and Gardens, Memphis, 1996-1997, unpublished checklist.

2002 *The Gilded Cage: Views of American Women*, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, 2002, unpublished checklist.

2004 *Figuratively Speaking: The Human Form in American Art, 1770-1950*, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, 2004-2005, unpublished checklist.

2008 *The American Evolution: A History through Art*, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, 2008, unpublished checklist.

2013 *American Journeys: Visions of Place*, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, 21 September 2013 - 28 September 2014, unpublished checklist.

2015 *Alfred Maurer: At the Vanguard of Modernism*, National Academy Museum and School of Fine Arts, New York; Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover; Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, 2015-2016 (shown only in Andover and Bentonville), unnumbered catalogue, repro.

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## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 2003 Epstein, Stacey Beth. "Alfred H. Maurer: Aestheticism to Modernism, 1897-1916." Ph.D. dissertation, City University of New York, 2003: 46, 50-51, repro.
- 2011 Naeem, Asma. "Alfred Henry Maurer, *Young Woman in Kimono*." In *Corcoran Gallery of Art: American Paintings to 1945*. Edited by Sarah Cash. Washington, 2011: 184-185, 275, repro.

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