

Abstract

**The Material Is The Message: Rubbings and Prints in Postwar Japanese Calligraphy**

This paper addresses ground-breaking experiments with materials and techniques by a new generation of postwar Japanese avant-garde calligraphers, who, sharing a more reflective and innovative views on calligraphy's materials, set out to challenge calligraphy's conventional “four treasures”— ink, paper, ink stone and brush. This study argues that attention to materiality, as a large feature of postwar art worldwide, was used by calligraphers as a means to enter the art processes of the larger national and international scale. It served as a common ground for starting a conversation between several groups of artists, such as printmakers, abstract painters and calligraphers.

In particular, this study focuses on works of two Bokujinkai artist, Inoue Yūichi (1916-1985) and Shinoda Shōji (1927-2000). Inoue's experiments revived *takuhon* ink rubbings as a modern art medium. His cooperation with abstract painter and art theoretician Hasegawa Saburō emphasized its relatedness to the surrealist technique of *frottages* by Max Ernst. At the same time, Shinoda integrated carved calligraphy into the avant-garde calligraphic practice, actively establishing a connection with the contemporaneous *sōsaku hanga* print makers, such as Onchi Koshirō and Munakata Shikō. While the phenomenon of avant-garde calligraphy in postwar art landscape of Japan recently inspired several studies, the specific role that the interest in materiality played in it remains understudied. By closing this gap, this paper specifically demonstrates that addressing a common issue of materiality helped the postwar calligraphers overcome boundaries between different art forms and contest the established art hierarchies.