



# 物の哀れ

“the beauty of transient things”

*Pencil Studies of Vintage Japanese Photos*

By Pamela Duhrkoop



# Introduction

---

Though I was born in Oregon, I was one and a half years old when I first went to Japan and I lived there for twenty years. Japan is the home of my heart. I wanted to express that aspect of my story through art. This booklet is a collection of pencil studies based on vintage photographs of Japanese women from the late 1800s and early 1900s that I found posted online. I wanted to capture the essence of quiet strength and dignity that I found in these women from the past. While drawing them, I was filled with the knowledge that though I did not know their names, each of them had a life, a family, and a story of their own.

**Year**

---

2024

**Medium**

---

*Pencil*



*hana~flower*

Like a budding flower breaking into bloom, this young girl is blooming into her beauty and into the beginning of her adult life. There is a delicateness in her face, like the petals of the flower she is holding. She was the first photo I found and first drawing I did in this series. The discovery of her portrait led to me finding the others I used for this series of pencil studies.





**Year**

---

2024

**Medium**

---

*Pencil*



*kasa~umbrella*

Since I was little, I loved the traditional Japanese umbrellas. I had several miniature versions that I would play with when I was a kid. The folds of her kimono were visually fascinating with all their value differences and movement. It was a challenge to capture that in pencil, but ultimately very satisfying.

**Year**

2024

**Medium**

*Pencil*

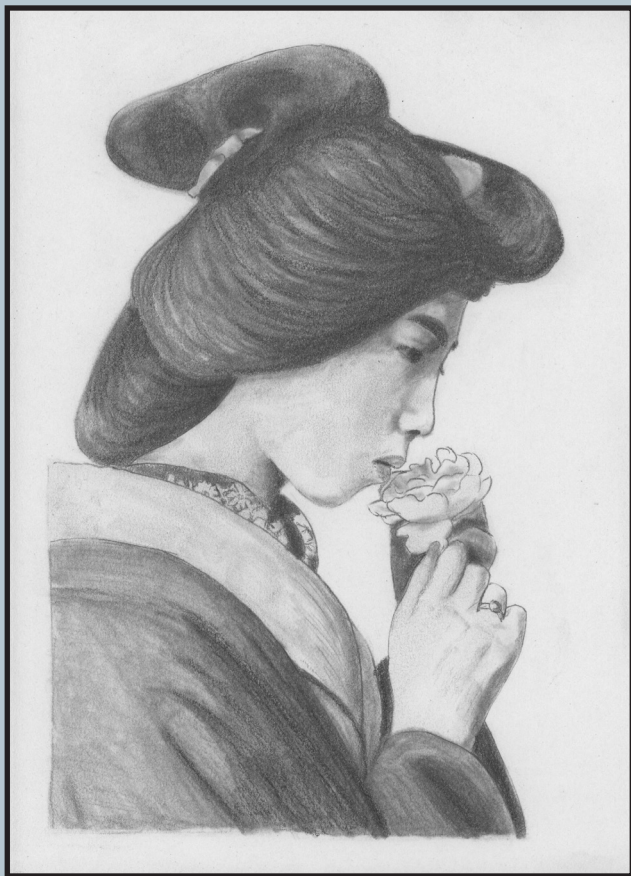
強い

*tsuyoi~strong*

I was drawn to the strength of spirit I saw in this woman's eyes. Unlike some of the other photographs, her hair and outfit were not as perfected. She had a simple, relatable appearance. Among all the drawings, this might be the one I am most proud of. The value differences play together well to highlight her eyes and face in general, which I wanted to be the main focus.







**Year**

---

2024

**Medium**

---

*Pencil*

静か

*shizuka~quiet*

I was drawn to do a study of this portrait because it seemed like a quiet stolen moment. Though she is holding the flower, she is not looking at it, her eyes are directed elsewhere. She looks a little sad, contemplating something unknown. Like all of the photographs I used for reference, there is so much depth behind her eyes and expression, a whole life that is beautiful and unknown, lost to history.

**Year**

2024

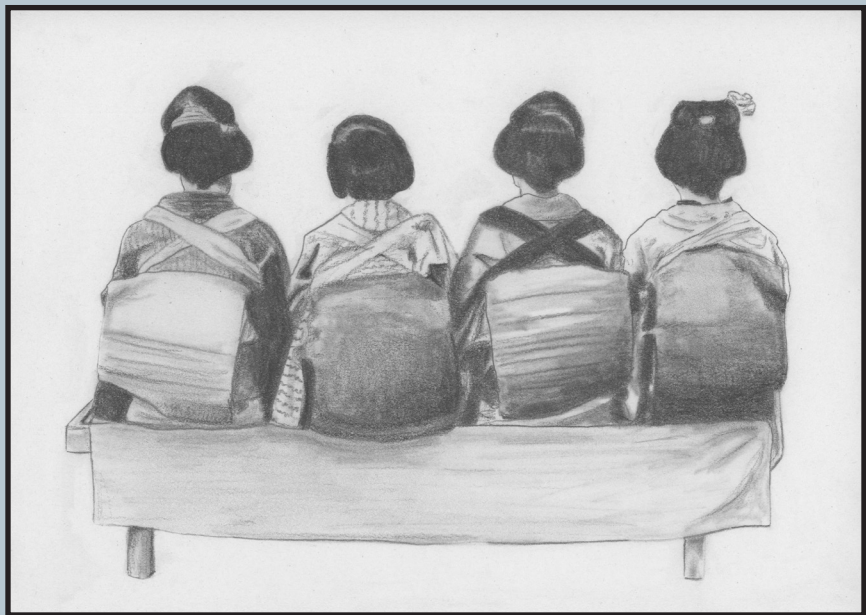
**Medium**

*Pencil*

友達

*tomodachi~friends*

I had to draw my own version of the photograph I found of four women sitting on a bench together. There is a camaraderie there, even though I could not see their faces. I wanted to capture that sense of togetherness. The variety in their hairstyles and outfits made them fun to draw and adds an interesting dimension to the drawing. Throughout all cultures and times, the need for friendship unites us.





**Year**

---

2024

**Medium**

---

*Pencil*

女武者

*onna-bugeisha~female warrior*

Popular culture often paints samurai as male only. However, female warriors did exist in Japan. They were known as onna-bugeisha. They were trained to fight, to protect their towns and act as bodyguards for the wives and concubines of powerful leaders. Women even fought in battle alongside men and in their own combat units. Some portraits of such warrior women still exist from the 1800s. Depicted here is one such woman.

**Year**

2024

**Medium**

*Pencil*

思い

*omoi-thought*

I found this woman so mysterious. She looks deep in thought as she looks down. I found myself wondering as I drew her what her thoughts were, what she was thinking, what was happening in her life as her portrait was taken, freezing her in time. I will never know the answers to my questions; it will always be a mystery lost to time and there is something profoundly beautiful about that.





# Acknowledgements

Thank you to my parents who gave me the opportunity to grow up in Japan. And to my art teachers through the years who encouraged me to keep drawing. Thank you to my friends, Hannah and Dineh, for being my cheerleaders in life. And thank you to my computer for not dying while I worked on this project.



