

1 SUPER FLAT

In 2000 Takashi Murakami issued his *Superflat Manifesto*, a bold statement about his approach to image making. The term *Superflat* underscored his early embrace of the ideas espoused by Andy Warhol and other Pop artists, in which the distinctions between “high art” and “low art” were completely leveled. However, *Superflat* also described a method of organizing pictures that lay outside Western art. Critical to the articulation of this visual strategy was Nobuo Tsuji’s book *Lineage of Eccentrics*. Tsuji had discussed the careers of little-known artists from the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries who were remarkable for their bizarre images and often unorthodox techniques that frequently relied more upon the two-dimensional picture plane than on the recession into space typically seen in European and American art. He subsequently suggested connections between this avant-garde art and the manga and anime of recent times. Thus, Murakami—who frequently incorporated manga into his imagery—could now point to uniquely Japanese precedents with which he strongly identified.

Superflat may be described as the extreme compression of the space between three-dimensional objects so that the picture plane is particularly emphatic. In his manifesto Murakami acknowledges that rather than relying on words alone, it can be easier to understand these ideas by looking at specific paintings. Thus, this section juxtaposes historical works by some of Tsuji’s *Eccentrics* that demonstrate this intentional flattening of the composition with works from Murakami’s early career.