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# Visual Haiku: Haiku in the Age of Global Visual Media

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## Abstract

While deeply rooted in Japanese culture, haiku poetry also deals with themes of universal appeal and can thus resonate with people all around the world and through the ages. In this article, I reinterpret the tradition of written haiku poetry into today's ever-expanding realm of globalisation and visual media. The outcome of this reinterpretation is a photographic concept that I call Visual Haiku. Visual Haiku transfer the essence of traditional written haiku into a new medium, breathing new life into the timeless concepts of haiku, ensuring they resonate powerfully in today's interconnected and visually driven world. I also discuss how Visual Haiku function across two very different cultures and ages.

## Keywords

Artistic Research, Creative Practice, Cultural Heritage, Everywhen, Haiku, Landscape, Photography, Transmedia Storytelling, Visual Art, Visual Haiku.

## Introduction

Haiku poetry holds a profound and enduring role in the cultural history of Japan. While deeply rooted in Japanese culture, the themes of haiku also deal with the shared human experience, deep emotions, and the world's natural beauty. These themes have a universal appeal and resonate with people all around the world.

In this article, I reinterpret the age-old tradition of written haiku poetry into today's ever-expanding realm of globalisation and visual media. The outcome of this reinterpretation is a photographic concept that I call Visual Haiku with capitalised initial letters (Figure 1). Although many authors have previously referred to their work as visual haiku, these approaches simply focus on minimalist images capturing a fleeting moment and fail to fully capture the deeper structures and principles that underlie the creation of written haiku. I will demonstrate how these underlying principles can be taken into consideration and reinterpreted. This way, Visual Haiku keep the spirit of haiku alive while allowing the form to evolve with the times, offering a fresh means of artistic expression in an increasingly visual-centric world.

The famous semiotician Roland Barthes was fascinated by the inherent ability of haiku to outstrip conventional modes of signification and perception. [1][2] He thought that haiku were essentially the same as Zen's koans in that they outwit the desire to interpret and that 'there is a moment when language ceases'. [3] A haiku should simply be read

and felt without any effort for interpretation. Therefore, Western methods of interpretation fail haiku. As Barthes put it, 'haiku reproduces the designating gesture of the child pointing whatever it is [...], merely saying: that!' [3]



Figure 1. A Visual Haiku. Double exposure. Photo: Author, 2023.

As Barthes is one of the key semioticians when it comes to the interpretation of visual images, it is notable to examine how he compares haiku to photographs. According to him, both haiku and photographs capture a single moment or fragment of a larger reality, which allows for a depth of interpretation. In a sense, a haiku is to the novel what photography is to film. Perhaps the biggest difference that Barthes finds between photographs and haiku is the excess of meaning that photographs contain, and haiku lack: '... a photograph is bound to say everything: were it to speak of the boatman, it would have to tell us what he was wearing, how old he was, how dirty; of the kitten, its colour. It produces excesses of meaning'. A haiku, on the other hand, only shows the very essential and forces the writer to be selective with what few words to choose to give 'an effect of the real'. [2][3]

In the following, starting from the premises given by Barthes, I further examine the links between haiku and photographs. Within certain limits, I challenge Barthes' proposition that a photograph contains an excess of meaning and show how photographs can be used in a manner similar to how words are used in written haiku.

This work is part of my doctoral research at the University of Lapland. In earlier publications, I have studied the truthfulness of landscape photographs of Northern nature and how a photograph can convey an extended nature experience to the viewer. [4][5] A key method I use is artistic

research in which my photographic artworks engage in dialogue with findings from surveys, written sources and works from other artists. [6][7][8] Within this research framework, this article focuses on one specific approach, i.e., Visual Haiku, to bring forward the emotional, tacit reality that lies beyond the direct, iconic representation of landscapes.

## Written Haiku: A Brief Introduction

Haiku (俳句) is a traditional, concise form of Japanese poetry. A haiku typically describes a moment in the present and includes a 'season word' (*kigo*) that anchors the poem in time while imbuing it with both transience and timelessness. The poet and the reader are united by their shared experience of nature and the changing seasons, of ageing, and the passage of time. [9][10]

There are only a few rules to haiku: 17 syllables or phonetic sounds usually divided among three phrases (5-7-5), a sense of cutting images or ideas that are juxtaposed (*kiru*), and a reference to a season (*kigo*). A haiku also contains a *kireji*, which refers to a cutting word that is comparable to the caesura in Western poetry. In translation, *kireji* may be represented by a dash, an exclamation point or left unmarked. Though brief, haiku tell a story or paint a vivid picture, leaving it to the reader to draw out meaning and complete the poem in their mind's eye. [9][10]

Rhythmically, the Japanese language naturally falls into measures of five and seven syllables. Although this is not necessarily the case in other languages (e.g., iambs and trochees work more naturally in English), the structure of haiku has become popular worldwide due to the combination of its apparent simplicity and immense expressive power.

Syllables may be counted differently in different languages, and words can be of different average lengths. The word 'haiku' itself contains three syllables in Japanese (ha-i-ku) but two in English (hai-ku). In Japanese, haiku may be comprised of as few as three words, whereas in English the 5-7-5 structure usually requires more. Thus, although there is certain beauty in the 5-7-5 structure, it may not be sensible to follow it exactly when writing haiku in—or translating them into—another language. In practice, sometimes the rule is strictly followed, and sometimes it is not.

Although in English haiku typically appear as three lines, in Japanese they are traditionally printed as a single line [9]. However, the number of lines is irrelevant from the point of view of this study. The division of content into two conceptually independent parts that are juxtaposed is more interesting. One part, usually the first or the third line, is typically grammatically independent from the rest but, more importantly, it differs in content as well. This juxtaposed part creates a change in mental imagery and does not just restate the previous part. One can say that, in typical haiku, two textually created images collide (*kiru*) and form a new, surprising image that is more than the sum of its parts. This is well demonstrated in a classic haiku written by the early master Bashō in 1689: [11]

*stormy sea —  
stretching out over Sado  
Heaven's River*

\* \* \*

*araumi ya / sado ni yokotau / amanogawa*

The first line gives the reader a mental image of rough seas. The cutting word 'ya', is the *kireji*, which functions somewhat like an exclamation point that emphasises the violence and vastness of the water. 'Ya' is replaced with '—' in this translation. The mental image is, of course, somewhat different for every reader, as it depends on their cultural background, prior knowledge, and life experience. The second line expands the content of the first line, making the mental image more detailed. There is now an image of a small island at the sea's mercy. The third line brings in a surprising new image that collides with the existing one as Heaven's River (the Milky Way) crosses the sky. As a result, a new idea is formed that reveals a deeper meaning (of life, of the passage of time, and mortality) than its components would reveal on their own separately. [11]

During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the art of haiku made its way into numerous linguistic realms across the globe, transcending cultural boundaries. R. H. Blyth played a pioneering role in introducing haiku to the English-speaking world. [12] Ezra Pound and the Imagism movement were deeply influenced by the principles of haiku. [13] Prominent Western writers with diverse backgrounds, such as the African-American novelist and poet Richard Wright and the Beat Generation writer Jack Kerouac have crafted their own haiku, infusing new dimensions into this old art form while cherishing its intrinsic essence. [14][15]

## Visual Haiku in Theory

'A picture is worth a thousand words' is a well-known adage in many cultures. It is no wonder, then, that Barthes writes about the excess of meaning in a photograph when he compares it to haiku, which consist of just a few words. A picture can be quite minimalistic in its expression, however, and on the other hand, the few words of a haiku can create a vivid, complex mental image or an entire story for the reader. Could there be images that would be simple enough to not have any excess meaning that could capture the spirit of haiku in their own visual language? I will show that there is a genre in photography within which such images can be created quite easily: nature landscape photography. This does not mean that there could not be any other genres of photography that could be used for the creation of Visual Haiku; on the contrary, I will provide an example later. However, nature landscape photography is arguably the most usable genre for Visual Haiku, as nature and landscape are recurring, central themes in textual haiku as well. The photographs I discuss are mainly from the Arctic or the Subarctic regions as those areas are the focus of my research.

In the previous chapter, I described a written haiku in visual terms, since it is common for a reader to construct mental

images as they read this kind of text. In a photograph, it is easy to make two visual images collide, as in *kiru*, by using the camera to create a double-exposed image. Thus, a Visual Haiku can be formed by combining two simple visual images into a single photograph wherein each image tells its own part of the story. In the spirit of ‘authentic’ nature photography, the combining should preferably be done on-site and directly in the camera. Only basic image editing should be done afterwards. In this way, Visual Haiku retain additional verisimilitude and better ‘give the effect of the real’ as Barthes said written haiku do. [2]

From the point of view of nature photography, another interesting aspect of haiku is its seasonal reference, *kigo*. In Visual Haiku, *kigo* is included almost automatically, since it is difficult to exclude any seasonal reference on either of the multi-exposure elements if the subject matter is nature. In written haiku, *kigo* often comes in the form of a metonym and can be difficult to spot for those who lack an understanding of Japanese cultural references. In Bashō’s haiku in the previous chapter, *kigo* refers to the Japanese festival of Tanabata, a star festival that celebrates the meeting of two lover deities, Orihime and Hikoboshi, who in the night sky are represented by the stars Vega and Altair, separated by the Milky Way, i.e. ‘Heaven’s River’. However, the haiku can be interpreted adequately without knowledge of the Tanabata Festival. The combination of rough weather and the Milky Way can induce in the reader a *kigo* that adequately matches the meaning of the haiku, even when the interpretation is made without complete information.

The stars Vega and Altair, together with Deneb, also form the Summer Triangle, a bright star pattern that is visible and well known in the northern hemisphere (Figure 2). A person familiar with both Bashō’s haiku and the Summer Triangle could identify the season as late summer, as the weather often gets rougher then, although the triangle is visible throughout the summer. In the Subarctic, *kigo* would naturally refer to late summer or early fall, as the stars would not be visible during the bright nights of high summer. Thus, the conclusion reached about *kigo* would be correct, although the logic used to arrive at it would not be entirely correct.

Although both images are visible at the same time in a double-exposure photograph of a Visual Haiku, one of the images typically dominates the viewer’s attention over the other at any given moment. This phenomenon is like the bistable optical illusion of Rubin’s vase (Figure 3), where one sees either a vase or two silhouetted faces. [16] The switch of attention from one image to the other may be triggered when the viewer notices some detail from the non-dominant image, which sticks out, even as the other image commands most of the attention. This kind of triggering element in a picture, which makes the viewer switch attention, can be considered a kind of visual *kireji*, since it is at this moment of change that the mind realises the combined ‘big picture’—the deeper meaning of the whole.

It would be tempting to equate visual *kireji* with Barthes’ concept of punctum, as they both pierce the viewer’s consciousness and evoke a strong mental response. [1] However, there is a clear difference between them: visual *kireji*

is a simple visual element composed into the image that sticks out to all the viewers—this is intended by the photographer. Punctum, on the other hand, produces a meaning that arises from the viewer’s past experiences and mindset, regardless of the photographer’s intentions—it is a response unique to the individual viewer.

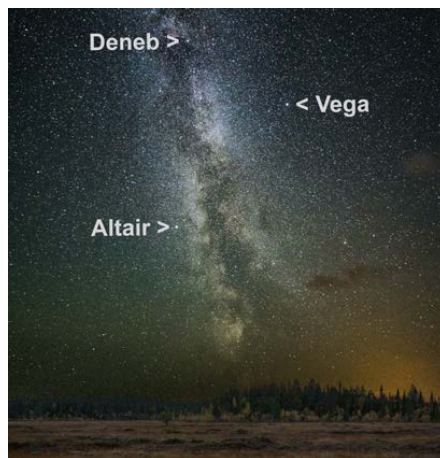


Figure 2. Altair and Vega, separated by the Milky Way, seen from Northern Finland in mid-September. Deneb is the third star of the Summer Triangle. Double exposure. Photo: Author, 2023 (2015).

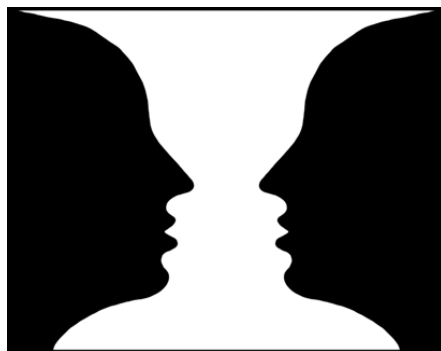


Figure 3. Rubin’s vase. [16] Author’s version of Rubin’s original, 2023.

## A Framework for Creating Visual Haiku

Based on the discussion above, I propose a framework for creating Visual Haiku, consisting of simple rules. As in art in general, and non-Japanese haiku poetry in particular, these rules can be bent once one knows them. They should be considered as guidelines rather than absolute must-follws and as a stimulant for creativity.

1. Create a double-exposure photograph on-site and directly in the camera. In the photograph, combine two

colliding visual elements (*kiru*) of nature that together reveal a story. Averaging the images is the most natural and thus the recommended mode of merging.

2. In each exposure, make sure to keep the composition and content visually simple. Each image should represent one of two parts of a story.
3. In at least one of the images, include a visual element that reveals the season (*kigo*).
4. In at least one of the images, include a detail that draws the viewer's attention, emphasises the visual content of the image and helps the viewer switch attention from one image to the other (*kireji*). Pay attention to how this detail is placed compositionally in the final double exposure. It should draw the viewer's attention.
5. Do not name the Visual Haiku. Furthermore, avoid content description in the naming of the image file. Instead, let the content speak for itself.
6. Otherwise, the actual content of the individual images is left to the artist to decide: whatever story they wish to tell and whatever emotion they wish to convey. They can draw inspiration from classic haiku themes, or, as in contemporary haiku, expand upon these themes.

Naming is a common practice in works of visual art. Most photographs are nowadays stored in the format of a digital file, and naming of the file is unavoidable, although it is possible to give a name that is not descriptive of the image content. A descriptive name is an interpretation of the image, a Western approach to haiku that Barthes warns us about. [3] Thus, to not diminish the emotional impact of the picture itself, Visual Haiku should not be named.

### Visual Haiku in Practice

Explaining Visual Haiku in writing is, paradoxically, very much against the spirit of haiku, since they should just be seen and felt, not interpreted. However, some explanation is necessary to fulfil the purpose of this article. Therefore, I will next discuss the interpretation of some Visual Haiku.

Figures 4a and 4b show two versions of the same theme, a sunny summer day in a pine forest. The pictures are double exposures made on-site directly in the camera with minimal post-processing. They consist of two images: a summer sky with cumulus clouds and a closeup of a snag (i.e., a dying pine tree). The bark on the right side of the images shows that the tree is partially still alive, while the exposed part of the trunk on the left is a telltale sign of the ongoing process of dying. Thus, the image recounts a memory of a sunny summer day in a pine forest, something to which virtually everyone from my Northern home country can relate. At the same time, it reminds the viewer of the passage of time and mortality, which are typical themes in haiku. This imagery can also be understood in countries that do not have pine forests or a similar climate; however, the underlying emotion may not come across as powerfully.



Figures 4a and 4b. Two variations of a Visual Haiku. Double exposures. Photos: Author, 2020.

The clouds also act as *kigo* in these images since, in the North, they emerge during hot summer days. The dark line, a shadow between the living and the dead parts of the tree, acts as *kireji*. When one views the left side, the calm and relaxed feeling of the sunny sky dominates the mental image. But when the eye is drawn to the dark line, the viewer registers the tree trunk, and darker undertones from the other image emerge in the viewer's mind. In Figure 4b, also the branch stump and its shadow act as *kireji*. They feel almost like a handle from which one can turn the view from the sky to the tree trunk and vice versa.

In Figure 4a, the two images are less blended, and it is easier to separate them in one's mind than it is with Figure 4b. Thus, one might say that in Figure 4a, the *kireji* is sharper, and the collision of the two images is stronger. The simplicity of Figure 4a is more haiku-like. Conversely, Figure 4b opens up slower—there is more to see, and it invites the viewer to linger and enjoy the artwork a little while longer.

Using exactly two images forms a nice parallel to the two-part content structure in textual haiku. The use of three or more images would easily make the resulting image complex and confusing. However, a single image can consist of more than one sub-image. In Figures 4a and 4b, the living and the dead parts of the snag form two such sub-images. This nicely mirrors the structure of textual haiku. In Bashō's haiku discussed earlier, the first line provides the reader with a mental image that is then expanded in the second line, making the image more detailed. The third line brings in a second image that collides with the first. Similarly, in Figure 4a, the snag image is analogous to the two-line part of the

haiku, where the dead and the living part of the tree are the two ‘lines’, and the cloudy sky is the third one.

The simplification of images not only lowers the cognitive load on the viewer but also amplifies the message of what remains in the image. McCloud illustrates this with images of the human face: the more simplified a cartoon face is, the more people it can describe; thus, more people identify themselves with the character. [17] The same applies to Visual Haiku: when an image is abstracted through simplification, it becomes more relatable to a wider audience. Figures 4a and 4b could have been taken in almost any pine forest; therefore, viewers can more easily relate to them with their own memories of different forests. If the image contained an iconic landmark, it would fix its location and, to an extent, alienate the viewer. Interestingly, in the whole of his oeuvre, Bashō only speaks once of Mount Fuji, perhaps the most iconic landmark of Japan, and even then, he describes it as hidden behind misty rain. [2]

Notice, however, that Bashō’s haiku about the stormy sea is tied to a certain place (i.e., Sado Isle) on purpose. Since the place and its festival are known to Japanese readers it helps the poet to direct the reader’s thoughts towards the desired direction. On the other hand, in many other haiku, Bashō uses more universal textual images, such as an old pond and a frog. Correspondingly, in Visual Haiku, the artist can choose between genericity and recognisability. With a visual image, however, it is more difficult to create a generic mental image of, say, a pond, because a photograph always shows at least some detailed features of its subject (cf. Barthes’ claim that photographs have an excess of meaning). One does not get rid of this challenge entirely with Visual Haiku, but its effect can be minimised by using simplified, minimalist images of generic subjects. Conversely, on another level, an image of a pond is more generic than the corresponding word because it can be understood regardless of the language(s) the viewer speaks.

### Composing Visual Haiku

After the discussion above, the general structure and formation of a Visual Haiku can now be presented in Figure 5. Two separate ideas (images) are juxtaposed (*kiru*) in double exposure. The combined image also includes visual elements that form *kireji* and *kigo*.

As haiku are meant to be felt and not interpreted, examples of Visual Haiku, including the one composed in Figure 5, are shown in Figures 6–8 without further explanation. They are left to speak for themselves in the hope that they convey a certain feeling—and a story—to the viewer, who is now familiar with the proposed concept of Visual Haiku.

As mentioned earlier, nature landscape is a natural subject area for Visual Haiku since nature is a central theme in traditional haiku as well. However, the use of landscapes or nature in general as the subject matter is not absolutely necessary, even though it was mentioned in the rules for Visual Haiku. The subject matter can be further expanded if so desired—the same is true for traditional Japanese haiku: while they usually feature nature imagery, they may cover a wide

range of other topics, such as observations of daily life and relationships. Furthermore, in modern English haiku, the use of *kigo* is less common, and haiku poets are often more flexible in terms of their subject matter.

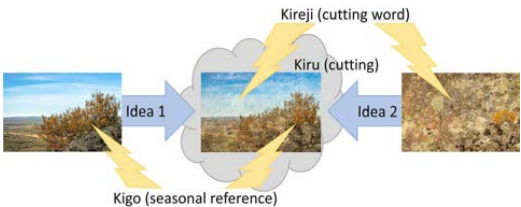


Figure 5. Composing a Visual Haiku. Image: Author, 2023.



Figures 6-8. Examples of Visual Haiku. Figures 6 and 7 are double exposures. Photos: Author, 2021, 2023 and 2017, respectively.

Figures 6 and 7 are constructed by combining two images at the same location. Typically, one image has a wider view, whereas the other image is a detail taken in a different direction. Figure 8 is an example of a subject matter that is different from nature. It depicts a city environment: a view from the underground. Although it does not include a nature landscape, it adopts other elements of Visual Haiku quite

well. There is even *kigo*: the beanie in the boy's head indicates that it is the cold season. Although Figure 8 looks like a double exposure, it is a single shot. In this case, this is just an irrelevant technicality, since the effect is the same as in a double exposure, and the spirit of Visual Haiku is retained.

The rules of Visual Haiku form a framework for ideation. Rules can challenge artists to think creatively within the boundaries they set. This can lead to innovative and unique perspectives. Restricting oneself with these rules is no different from a poet following the rules of textual haiku. Ultimately, the usefulness of rules in the creative process of art-making depends on the individual artists, their working styles and goals. In photography, as well as in other arts, some artists thrive under the structure and challenge of rules or guidelines (see e.g., [18]), while others prefer to work in more open and flexible environments.

Waley, an early translator of Japanese literature, wrote, 'It is not possible that the rest of the world will ever realize the importance of Japanese poetry, because of all poetries it is the most completely untranslatable.' [9] Furthermore, Benjamin shows the complexity and virtual impossibility of an exact translation of any text from one language to another. [19] The meanings of many visual signs are much more universally understandable than written words, even though one cannot deny that also visual messages are bound culturally and contextually. Therefore, one can argue that the concept of Visual Haiku harnesses the expressive power of the haiku form into a format that is more universally accessible across linguistic borders than written haiku.

## Related Work

The term visual haiku (not to be confused with the more specific term 'Visual Haiku', as defined in this article) is used to describe a wide variety of visual artworks that, by various means, intend to evoke the essence of haiku poetry. Techniques vary from photographs, paintings, and drawings to digital art or animation.

The idea of visualising a written haiku is not new. Many classic haiku poets embellished their writing with shorthand, brush-stroke drawings. [9] However, these are visualisations of written haiku poems instead of independent works of art. Building on this tradition, in his series of experimental prints, Macdonald-Wright offers visual interpretations of haiku by seven Japanese poets, including Bashō, Buson, and Issa. [20] Examples of combining contemporary haiku and images in equal terms are found in the Modern Haiku Journal. [21] Also notable is the Indo-Irish collaboration of Mukherjee and Rosenstock, which juxtaposes haiku inspired by the Upanishads, ancient texts of Hindu philosophy, with contemporary black-and-white photography depicting people and places in India. [22]

Visual haiku can exist without any reference to written haiku. They can be independently created images that are minimalistic in style, such as the poetic small-scale photographs of Yamamoto, the stark and timeless seascapes of Sugimoto, or the ethereal landscape photographs of Kenna. Yamamoto also constructed stories by arranging several

photographs into wall installations. This practice resembles the textual haiku structure of 17 syllables in three phrases (5-7-5), although Yamamoto did not rigorously follow any such rules. [23][24][25]

A great number of amateur and professional photographers use the term 'visual haiku' to label their work. A search for the hashtag '#haiku' on Instagram returns over two million images, and for #visualhaiku, almost 13,000 images. [26] However, these pictures are very diverse in style, technique, and subject matter. Although minimalist style and nature as subject matter are somewhat prevalent, there are also many colourful and rich images of, for example, food, pets, families, and partying. Each work in this widely varied imagery introduces aspects of written haiku that each artist likely considers important; as a whole, however, the definition of visual haiku remains ambiguous.

Several groups include haiku among their topics on Flickr, an online community for photographers. A group named 'Visual Haiku' has over 1,300 members and 66,000 images. [27] Mostly, the pictures are nature photographs that, according to the group's description, are poetic and 'evoke contemplation and reverie'. Notably, virtually all photographs shared are rather traditional single exposures. Their subject matters vary from landscapes to animals and macro shots. Occasionally, people, pets, human artefacts, and cityscapes are shown. Creative techniques such as multi-exposures or intentional camera movement (ICM) are rare exceptions. While many of the images are simplistic and restrained in colour, many are complex in composition and bright in colour—by no means minimalistic. Written haiku are encouraged to complement the photographs.

The framework for creating Visual Haiku that is presented in this article forms a more comprehensive and articulate definition of visual haiku than any of the related work described above. Although the rules in the framework are based on the principles of written haiku, Visual Haiku function as an independent art form, without reference to or support from any text.

As mentioned earlier, according to Barthes, Western methods of interpretation do not suffice for haiku. [3] This can be understood via the space-time concept of *Ma* (間), which has significantly influenced traditional Japanese arts and culture. Unlike the Western concept of space-time, which has a quantitative connotation, the Japanese people in the past did not recognize the distinct concepts of space and time; these concepts were perceived, instead, as inseparable entities. *Ma* indicates both the distance between objects in space and the interval of time between different phenomena. *Ma* is sometimes equated with negative space in art; however, it is a much more complex and subtle concept. As an example of this complexity, Isozaki describes the arrival of Western clocks in Japan in the 16th century. In everyday Japanese life, time was measured by the rising and setting of the sun. The time between sunrise and sunset was divided into six equal parts, the lengths of which varied according to the length of day and night on a daily basis. According to Western thinking, time is absolute and flows uninterrupted from the past to the future. In Japan, instead of exact

chronological division, the clocks were adapted to announce the six intervals between sunrise and sunset which changed every day. [28]

In both written haiku and Visual Haiku, the idea of *Ma* as an interval or pause that holds tension and anticipation between things manifests itself in *kireji*—the pause or break between contrasting ideas or images that creates a moment of stillness and contemplation for the reader. *Ma*'s emphasis on subjective experience and emotion instead of (Western) rationality and logical analysis leads to the previously mentioned idea that haiku should just be read and felt without interpretation.

The two-dimensional perspective that is typical of Japanese visual arts and is closely related to *Ma* is also notable in this context. The three-dimensional perspective that was invented at the beginning of the Renaissance in Europe has not been as widely adopted in Japan. Instead, a moving aerial perspective is often used in which all elements are represented in two dimensions and in which a depth illusion is created by interleaving shapes. [29] In Visual Haiku, two images are interleaved, which creates a somewhat similar illusion of perspective.

### Aesthetics of Visual Haiku

Visual Haiku can also be examined from the perspective of aesthetics. Environmental aesthetics is classified into two main categories: cognitive and non-cognitive. Cognitive views consider knowledge and information to be essential to the aesthetic appreciation, whereas non-cognitive views prioritize features like engagement, emotion arousal, or imagination. [30]

With Visual Haiku, scientific knowledge helps one understand phenomena seen in the images. For example, understanding the seasonal reference *kigo* often requires at least a basic understanding of the natural sciences and how nature behaves in different seasons. If one is familiar with animal tracks and the animals that live in the Northern wilderness, one might deduce that the tracks in Figure 1 are those of a mountain hare (Figure 9). While this is not a necessary piece of information for appreciating the haiku, it does give one's interpretation a deeper and more personal meaning.



Figure 9. A mountain hare about to change fur colour from winter white to summer brown. Photo: Author, 2020.

Knowing the behaviour and habitat of the mountain hare is an example of how knowledge of the local environment can assist in the interpretation. Similarly, in the case of Bashō's haiku, knowing the culture and conditions of Sado Isle gives the haiku a deeper meaning. These kinds of local and regional narratives, folklore and mythological stories about nature are endorsed either as complementary to or as an alternative to scientific knowledge by many authors writing about environmental aesthetics. [31][32]

The aesthetic appreciation of landscapes often has a reflective, cognitive element as well. This sometimes incorporates scientific (e.g., geological or ecological) knowledge, but it can also manifest 'metaphysical imagination', which 'sees or seems to see in a landscape some indication, some disclosure of how the world ultimately is'. [33] Eaton similarly argues in favour of giving the imagination an important role in the aesthetic experience on the condition that natural scientific knowledge directs aesthetic appreciation. [34] As the ultimate purpose of Visual Haiku is not to depict nature as is, but to reveal some deeper meaning of our existence, there is certainly a non-cognitive, imaginative element at play in the interpretation process.

What comes to aesthetic categories, all of the Visual Haiku presented in this article may be considered beautiful. However, that is not their defining characteristic, as it is easy to follow the rules of Visual Haiku and create images that are not beautiful. The category that perhaps best describes the general aesthetics of Visual Haiku is the Lyotardian sublime. [35] Lyotard applied Kantian notions of the sublime to twentieth-century manifestations of the avant-garde in art. [36] In his view, the aesthetics of modern art correspond to the aesthetics of the sublime: [37]

*'The art-lover does not experience a simple pleasure, or derive some ethical benefit from his contact with art, but expects intensification of his conceptual and emotional capacity, an ambivalent enjoyment. Intensity is associated with an ontological dislocation. The art-object no longer bends itself to models, but tries to present the fact that there is an unrepresentable.'*

Lyotard's quote adequately describes the function of Visual Haiku. *Kiru*, the juxtaposition of two separate ideas (images), leads to an ontological dislocation. Visual Haiku also try to 'present the fact that there is an unrepresentable', i.e., a tacit reality, mentioned earlier in this article. We return to the idea that haiku, as well as Visual Haiku, should just be felt without interpretation. All this causes an ambivalent enjoyment that Lyotard wrote about.

### Conclusion

In this article, I propose the concept of Visual Haiku and introduce a framework for their creation. Visual Haiku, while following the rules and spirit of written haiku, stand as an independent art form. Rather than challenging the traditional written haiku, Visual Haiku serve as a captivating

expansion, breathing new life into the timeless concepts of haiku, ensuring they resonate powerfully in today's interconnected and visually-driven world.

The apparent simplicity of written haiku can be retained using a minimalistic visual language. The two-part content structure and juxtaposition of the parts (*kiru*), the seasonal reference (*kigo*) and the cutting word (*kireji*) can all be implemented in Visual Haiku. With a thoughtful composition of the photographs, one can control the excess of meaning that Barthes worries about.

The foundations for creating Visual Haiku have been laid, including a proposed framework, examples, and a theoretical discussion on how they function. I have demonstrated their expressive power and ability to transcend temporal and cultural borders. I will continue to employ Visual Haiku as a tool to interpret Northern nature. I encourage fellow artists to utilize the framework for various subjects and across different cultures.

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