

THE PROTOCOL OF THE KAKITSUBATA

A note for those wishing to attempt this exercise: each movement should be allotted a fixed duration of not less than three minutes; the hands should be free and the body unburdened; silence and focus are essential.

ICHI

CALM READINESS [OF THE BIRD]

*Prepare by aligning your posture,
adopt the alert calm of a bird.*

NI

[BEGIN AT] THE SURFACE OF THE FLOWER.

Focus your gaze on the flower, allow it to fill your mind.

SAN

ONE FLOWER [NOTHING ELSE].

Let the flower become the world.

SHI

WATER'S EDGE, MAKING A CHANGE.

Is there a threshold between you and the flower?

GO

A HOUSE AND THE MOON.

Where does the moon go when you enter the house?

CLOSE YOUR EYES AND SEE THE FLOWER.



MADAME BANKSIA:

MARGARET PRESTON'S FLOWER GAZING & THE PROTOCOL OF THE KAKITSUBATA

Readers of the PROCEEDINGS OF ESTAR(SER) will already be aware of the considerable efforts made by various scholars, collectors, bibliophiles, and editors to sift the historicity of that peculiar body known as THE ORDER OF THE THIRD BIRD. Despite these labors, a great deal of uncertainty (and even some genuine confusion) persists concerning the nature and workings of this fugitive and affiliating community—which would seem, at least in its modern incarnation, to function as a semi-clandestine association of histrionic aesthetes who convene to perform public and private rites of sustained attention to made things (often works of art). New documents bearing on the genesis, ideology, evolution, and practices of THE ORDER are continually coming to light, and we are pleased here to offer a brief, preliminary discussion of a striking body of sources from the “W Cache” that bear on Orientalizing tendencies among associates in Paris and Australia in the first half of the twentieth century.

TEXT AND CONTEXT

Across a career that reshaped Australian art, the celebrated and controversial modernist Margaret Preston (1875-1963) brought an uncanny intensity to the depiction of flowers—in both oil and woodblock print. Of her iconic self-portrait, now hanging in the Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney, she remarked acridly: “I am a flower painter—I am not a flower.” But was the distinction so simple? Perhaps not. New evidences suggest Preston may well have been familiar with exercises of metempsychotic self-exchange with flowering plants, techniques used by esoteric practitioners of the Japanese art of Ikebana or Kado, the ancient spiritual path of flower arranging. Like many Australian artists of her time, Rose McPherson (as Preston was known in her youth) traveled to Europe to complete her art education. It was in Paris in 1905 that she first visited the Musée Guimet and encountered the Japanese woodcuts, *ukiyo-e*, that would dramatically influence the direction of her future work. Recent investigation by the research consortium ESTAR(SER) suggests that a volée of the Order of the Third Bird, active in Paris in the early decades of the twentieth century, found a home in the bohemian circles that orbited Émile Guimet, the museum’s founder. Among Guimet’s close companions was the caricaturist and orientalist Félix Régamey (1844-1907), known for his contribution to the remarkable one-act play *Les Yeux clos* (*Eyes Closed*, 1896) and for the novella *Le Cahier rose de Madame Chrysanthème* (*The Pink Notebook of Madame Chrysanthemum*, 1893) both of which can be read as a coded description of renegade Bird activity. Did Régamey and Guimet’s travels in Japan expose them to Japanese arts of meditative regard, and did they carry these back to Paris? Was Preston initiated into occult techniques of flower gazing, and did these rites inflect her painterly commitments? Further research is needed, but a suggestive beginning can be made among a body of documents connected to Régamey within the copious “W Cache.” Here we find several clues that link anthomantic flower obsession to controversial, even perilous, inversions and exaggerations of traditional Bird practice. With some reservations, the Editorial Committee here presents a series of the most striking of these documents, each accompanied by a reconstructed protocol. Caution in their use is urged.



FIGURE: Rice paper sheet found between the pages *Les Yeux clos*. The elusive poem in calligraphy to the left takes as its theme the iris, and can be construed ploddingly as follows: “Whether in a house, or by a garden pool, or in a golden vase, it reigns as the king of flowers.” Régamey’s looser translation takes the form of poetic fragments in the attentional protocol offered overleaf. Through such protocols, members of Régamey’s circle courted semi-permanent metempsychotic union with flowers.