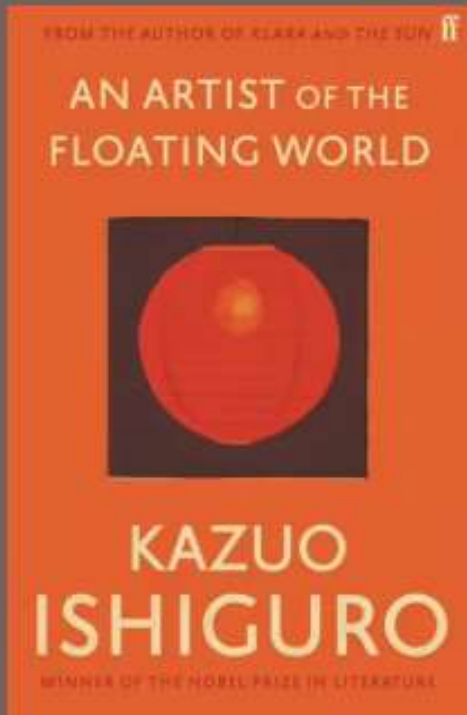


September 2023



An Artist of The Floating World made waves in the literary world in 1986, earning a spot on the Booker Prize shortlist and winning the Whitbread Book Award in the same year.

Set in post-WWII Japan during the American occupation, we follow the life of Masuji Ono, a celebrated painter enjoying his retirement. Ono spends his days repairing his house, tending his garden, and catching up with family and former associates in the old pleasure district or the "floating world" of the book's title, where he spent his evenings before the war.

Ono lost his wife and son during the war and now lives with his younger daughter, Noriko. When she begins a second round of marriage negotiations, Ono starts to reflect on his life. As he looks back on his earlier years, his recollections vacillate between what seems to be a genuine desire to assess his past honestly and the instinct to shield himself from any feelings of regret.

Right from the start of the novel, we become aware that Ono is an unreliable narrator. His memories are contradictory or clouded by uncertainty, and when he addresses the reader, it feels as if he's second-guessing how his actions will be interpreted by providing alternative

feels as if he's second-guessing how his actions will be interpreted by providing alternative viewpoints.

As the story unfolds, a sense of foreboding grows, and we begin to unravel Ono's history. Once a decadent artist trained to paint the pre-war geishas of the pleasure district, he breaks away from the tradition to become a pro-government painter who betrays one of his proteges.

Ishiguro propels the narrative forward masterfully, revisiting common themes, such as self-deception, ageing, guilt, regret, and the nature of memory. Despite using simple, delicate prose that feels quite formal — almost like a translation — it's smooth and seductive writing.

Ultimately, it appears that Ono is attempting to hide from his conflicted feelings and knowledge of his guilt by explaining away his past actions and avoiding the conclusion that despite his belief that he was doing the right thing, he lived at a time when values shifted, and culture changed.

Some members of the group thought the novel was beautifully written and described how it had had a profound impact on them. Others preferred Ishiguro's later works — such as "Remains of the Day" and "Never Let Me Go". Criticisms were raised about the meandering writing style, as well as how the narrator's formal language style made it difficult to emotionally attach to the characters.

Ratings: Pauline 2.5, Dianne, Lynda and Di 3.5, Janet, Sandy, Claudia, Margie and Suzy 4, Hetta 4.5

We look forward to seeing you again at our next meeting 6:30pm on Tuesday 14th of November at **the Boardroom in the 2nd floor of the Robina Community Centre**, when we'll talk about ***Oh William!*** by ***Elizabeth Strout***. Hope to see you there and Happy Reading!

The 2023 Reading List can be found in the sidebar, or below if you're on your mobile device.

Other Books We Read

October 2023

Middle England by Jonathon Coe, 3.5

Unruly by David Mitchell, 3.5

44 Scotland Street by Alexander McCall Smith, 3

Prophet Song by Paul Lynch, 3.5

The Black Snow by Paul Lynch, 4

The Wager: A tale of Shipwreck, Mutiny and Murder by David Grann, 3.5

This Other Eden by Paul Harding, 4

Chai Time at Cinnamon Gardens by Shankari Chandra, 2, 5, 3 and 4.

Wifedom by Anna Funder, 5

Burial Rites, Hannah Kent, 4 and 4.5

Questions of Travel by Michelle de Kretser, 5

Song of the Sun God by Sankari Chandran, 3

Victory City by Salman Rushdie, 4

Cloud Cuckoo Land by Anthony Doerr, 4

Tom Lake by Ann Patchett, 2, 3 and 3.5

The Secret Life of Sunflowers by Marta Molnar, 4

I Heard the Owl Call My Name by Margaret Craven, 5

On Brunswick Ground by Catherine de Saint Phalle, 3

Three by Valerie Perrin, 3.5 and 4

Fresh water for flowers by Valerie Perrin, 3 and 4

The great white bard – Shakespeare, race and the future by Farah Karim Cooper, 4