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In both music and architecture, the world is flattening. It may be, as the artist Takashi Murakami contends, superflat. Some examples from the worlds of music and architecture...
with 'legs', 'body' and 'head', each articulated by strips of curtain walling. On each side of the 'legs', openings are surrounded by canopies that mimic robot tank-track feet, while its reflective glass 'eyeballs' are partially covered by louvered 'eyelids' that were originally intended to 'wink' at night, accompanied by lighting that pulsed to the rhythm of 'The Robot Symphony', a piece by a local composer. 

**Cambodian Community Centre, Springvale, 2001**

In many ways this is a generic suburban brick-veneer building. However, there are elements that are not quite usual. It has a double-pitched gable roof, and at the ends of each gable, large curving yellow finials. These are chofas (sky tassels), and their presence indicates the Cambodian identity of the building. On a nearby Cambodian Buddhist temple their presence symbolises the protection of nagas, mythological snake-figures that perform a protective role in the Cambodian Buddhist tradition, but here their meaning is generalised to refer to their Cambodian origin.
Dancing about architecture, or writing about music?

One thing that music, architecture and other forms of contemporary culture have in common is that their most common expressions are genres or movements that have either begun in the West, or have been spread by its conquest, and that they are at the same time only partially or incompletely understood. When Western-influenced woodcuts of Edo artists like Katsushika Hokusai and Hiroshige Ando. These artists were able to, and did, use single-point perspective, but didn’t always choose to use it in a straightforward manner. In Hiroshige’s Landspar at Tango and The Ryogoku Bridge Riverbank, perspective is used to position some elements, while others are portrayed within the same picture as being within a depthlessly flat space, their importance overriding any conformity to perspectival rules. Music, like art, can be quick, ephemeral, and cheap. Rules can easily be broken or bent out of shape. It can be serious or playful. Architecture, on the other hand, is slow, (mostly) permanent and expensive. Its connection with contemporary culture is more distant, damped down by the serious forces of economics and the weight of architectural history.

However, Jumsai’s the Bank of Asia manages to be serious and playful. It was completed in the same year as the Lloyds and Hong Kong Shanghai Bank buildings, but instead of their coldly mechanistic representation of ducts, struts and pipes, it looks to a different future, an Asian cyborg future. Toyo Ito’s buildings are almost as dematerialised as constructions can be, their forms melting into light and virtuality, like anime horizons. They have no essence, architecture is spread thinly over their translucent surfaces. Closer to home, Melbourne is the perfect location for creative overlays of architecture, culture and location — for the pragmatic jamming together of forms, details and spaces to echo the old and the new, the East and the West, the North and the South.

When looking at unfamiliar products of culture, such as music made on foreign instruments or to different tuning systems, or architecture involving unfamiliar symbolism or rituals, we accept — perhaps too easily — that they are real. Yet when we encounter music or architecture that contains familiar elements, we are suspicious. They seem inauthentic, sullied by outside influences. Some worry so much about what is being lost through globalisation that they do not see, as Salman Rushdie once noted, that with translation there is not only loss but gain.