



Search for Modern and Contemporary Art in Japan

Search Databases



Artists

5,400+



Collections

473,000+



Museums

220+



Exhibitions

10,000+



Tools for Tomorrow's Exhibitions: Art Platform Japan, Digital Resources, and Knowledge Management in Japanese Art

Masako Kawaguchi

Keywords:

Japanese art databases; Collection documentation; Authority control; Curatorial research; Art Platform Japan (APJ)

ABSTRACT:

This paper presents Art Platform Japan (APJ), a digital research portal providing reliable, bilingual information on modern and contemporary Japanese art. Developed by Japan's Agency for Cultural Affairs and now operated by the National Center for Art Research (NCAR), APJ addresses research needs and limited international visibility for curators, researchers, and global audiences. Recent social, political, and cultural changes have diversified artistic values and curatorial practices worldwide, making broader access to Japanese art information increasingly critical. APJ develops key resources including the Dictionary of Artists in Japan and SHŪZŌ, aggregating museum collection data nationwide. Functioning as a dated index to accumulated art historical information, APJ employs bilingual content and Romanized metadata to reduce language barriers and foster institutional collaboration. By bridging research and exhibition-making, APJ provides digital tools supporting Japanese art globally.

Questo articolo presenta Art Platform Japan (APJ), un portale di ricerca digitale che offre informazioni affidabili e bilingui sull'arte giapponese moderna e contemporanea. Sviluppato dall'Agenzia per gli Affari Culturali del Giappone e ora gestito dal National Center for Art Research (NCAR), APJ risponde alle esigenze di ricerca e alla limitata visibilità internazionale di curatori, studiosi e pubblici globali. I recenti cambiamenti sociali, politici e culturali hanno diversificato valori artistici e pratiche curatoriali nel mondo, rendendo sempre più cruciale un ampio accesso alle informazioni sull'arte giapponese. APJ sviluppa risorse chiave come il Dictionary of Artists in Japan e SHŪZŌ, che aggrega dati delle collezioni museali nazionali. Come indice datato delle informazioni storico-artistiche accumulate, APJ utilizza contenuti bilingui e metadati romanizzati per ridurre le barriere linguistiche e promuovere la collaborazione istituzionale. Collegando ricerca e attività espositiva, APJ offre strumenti digitali a sostegno dell'arte giapponese nel mondo.

Opening Picture:

Screenshot of the top page of Art Platform Japan. <https://artplatform.go.jp>

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Introduction

Globalization and geopolitical transformations in the late twentieth century have significantly reshaped the art world. Contemporary art, once centered in Europe and North America, increasingly features Asian artists in major international exhibitions. Within this expanding landscape, Japanese art presents particular challenges and opportunities for international engagement. In this paper, “Japanese art” refers to both artworks produced by Japanese artists and artworks located within Japan, regardless of their origin. Temporally, APJ primarily focuses on art from the Meiji period (late 19th century) to the present day—the era of Japanese modernity when Japanese artists began encountering and working under the influence of international art movements and exhibitions. While the project occasionally references earlier transitional periods such as the Bakumatsu era (mid-19th century) for contextual understanding, its core mission centers on modern and contemporary art created from Japan’s modernization onward. This dual framework—geographic and temporal—clarifies the scope of Art Platform Japan’s resources and databases, which will be discussed in detail below.

According to art historian Caroline Turner, this development is closely linked to political and economic shifts in Asia.¹ Japanese artists began participating in major international exhibitions during the 1960s and 1970s, coinciding with Japan’s rise as the world’s second-largest

economy. Later, China’s rapid economic growth brought Chinese artists to global attention. Turner emphasizes that artists from regions once considered “peripheral” now receive recognition beyond the Western-dominated canon.² Understanding contemporary art therefore requires perspectives that extend beyond traditional Western frameworks.³

This acceleration of internationalization has imposed new demands on exhibition practices. In contemporary exhibition planning, sharing and accumulating information about artworks and artists across language barriers has become markedly more important. For international biennials and triennials in particular, obtaining accurate data on artworks, their locations, owners, and past exhibition histories constitutes the starting point for curatorial research.⁴ Yet the tools and environments for such work remain uneven across regions and languages.

In Western art history, information retrieval systems have long been systematically developed over extended periods. Resources including dictionaries and encyclopedias on artists such as Emmanuel Bénézit’s *Dictionnaire des peintres, sculpteurs, dessinateurs et graveurs*⁵ and *Allgemeines Lexikon der bildenden Künstler von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart* edited by Ulrich Thieme and Felix Becker,⁶ along with subject bibliographies and indexes like *Art Index*⁷ and *the Bibliography of the History of Art* (BHA),⁸ have served as foundational infrastructure supporting scholarship. These resources are now digitized and function as core tools for searching and sharing

bibliographic information, though implementation remains uneven across institutions and regions.

By contrast, information infrastructure for Japanese art has remained underdeveloped. Western resources provide limited coverage of Japanese art, and even within Japan, scholarly information sharing has progressed slowly. *Catalogues raisonnés*—comprehensive records of an artist’s works—have not been widely established in Japan. Even for Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849), creator of the internationally renowned ukiyo-e print *The Great Wave*, no *catalogue raisonné* was compiled domestically; British researchers Roger Keyes and Peter Morse realized it first.⁹

Fostering international understanding of Japanese art and connecting it to global exhibition activities therefore requires developing reliable information environments and advancing curatorial research utilizing such resources. This paper introduces the research portal Art Platform Japan (APJ)¹⁰ as a case study of constructing information infrastructure to support Japanese art research (fig. 1). Central to APJ’s design is its function as a dated index to art historical information, representing a departure from the prevalent practice of discarding older data in favor of constant updates without maintaining temporal context. The following analysis examines APJ’s structure, functions, and use cases to clarify the structural challenges facing research infrastructure for Japanese art and the approaches undertaken to address them.

Japanese Art Information Infrastructure: Historical Context and Structural Challenges

Compared with Western art history, the systematization of information sharing in Japanese art history has been delayed. This lag reflects cultural characteristics of knowledge and information management in Japan. According to library and information science scholar Akira Nemoto, Japan has not fully developed the “culture of constructing and utilizing knowledge stocks” that characterizes Europe and North America.¹¹ In the West, library systems guarantee access to and circulation of knowledge through classification, cataloging, and indexing. By assigning librarians specialized professional roles, these systems enabled knowledge to be widely shared across society. This foundation supported the development of scholarly societies, academic publishing, encyclopedias, dictionaries, copyright systems, and citation conventions, forming comprehensive mechanisms for knowledge communication.¹² Although Japan introduced similar systems during modernization, they often functioned as formal imports rather than effective social knowledge tools. Nemoto argues that the historical reliance on importing knowledge hindered endogenous development of such systems.¹³

Library and information science scholar Hisamichi Yamazaki points out that Japanese publishing culture lacks a philosophy regarding the device of “indexes.”¹⁴ Indexes are fundamental tools guaranteeing access to content and have become standard in Western publishing. Yet even in academic books in Japan,

indexes are often absent. The practice of searching for and verifying knowledge has not been fully institutionalized, reducing efficiency when consulting numerous sources.

Cultural Foundations: Knowledge Management in Japan

The observations of Nemoto and Yamazaki illuminate fundamental weaknesses in Japan's institutional frameworks for constructing and circulating knowledge. Unlike Western systems where libraries, scholarly societies, and standardized citation practices form an interconnected infrastructure, Japan's modernization imported these systems without fully integrating them into social practice. This structural deficiency directly underlies the delayed development of knowledge infrastructure in the art field, where mechanisms for recording, managing, and reusing knowledge remain underdeveloped. Consequently, no institutional environment exists for organizing, maintaining, and updating information about artworks, artists, or exhibitions.

Documentation Challenges: From Dictionaries to *Catalogues Raisonnés*

Inadequacies in information infrastructure for Japanese art are evident in multiple areas. Art dictionaries and biographical references often lack sources or citations, limiting verifiability and reusability. For instance, even *Kindai Nihon Bijutsu Jiten* (Dictionary of Modern Japanese Art),¹⁵ a standard reference work used by researchers that covers approximately 1,200 artists and organizations, provides no bib-

liographic references for individual entries. While users can identify artists and basic biographical facts, they cannot verify the information's sources or pursue deeper research, limiting the dictionary's value as scholarly infrastructure.

Similar structural problems appear in the underdevelopment of *catalogues raisonnés*. In Western contexts, major artists are often documented through *catalogues raisonnés*, which aim to systematically record all works by an artist, including current location, provenance, exhibition history, and bibliographic references, serving as foundational materials for both research and the art market. Creating such comprehensive resources

requires substantial financial and personnel commitments and raises complex issues of methodology, authentication, and legal liability. Professional organizations such as the Catalogue Raisonné Scholars Association (CRSA)¹⁶ in the United States and the International Catalogue Raisonné Association (ICRA, founded 2019)¹⁷ support scholars working with these challenges. In Japan, although compilation efforts have been made, the significance of *catalogues raisonnés* as academic datasets has not been fully recognized. Many Japanese publications labeled as "*catalogues raisonnés*" function more as art books or curated selections of works, failing to support specialized research. That British researchers compiled Hokusai's *catalogue raisonné* before Japanese scholars symbolically illustrates this issue.

Fig. 1: Screenshot of the top page of Art Platform Japan. <https://artplatform.go.jp>

Search for Modern and Contemporary Art in Japan



Artists
5,200+

Collections
444,000+

Museums
210+

Exhibitions
2,400+

Galleries/Art Spaces
2,500+

Featured artworks

Research Guides

Specialized lists of websites and databases compiled to support research on modern and contemporary art in Japan



Bibliographies

Resources for finding articles and research papers on Japanese art. (In Japanese only)



Artists

Resources for researching Japanese artists and art professionals.



Artworks

Guides to finding information on Japanese artworks in domestic museums.



Exhibitions

Tools to locate information on exhibitions related to Japanese art.



Museums and galleries

Resources for researching art museums and galleries within Japan. (In Japanese only)



Catalogues of Japanese museum collections

Catalogues of collections from museums and art institutions across Japan.

Reading Lists

Thematic introduction to recommended readings on modern and contemporary art in Japan. English translations are available for some of the texts.

Art schools and education

Artists' writings

Collectivism

Critics

Exhibitions, Events, and Sites

Feminism and/in Japanese art

Japan in Asia

80's The 1980s

Photography and media

State and ecology

Historical Context: Photographic Collections in Japan

Art historical research relies heavily on image materials, yet Japan has not developed photographic archives to the same extent. In the West, photo libraries, which have evolved into today's digital image collections, serve as crucial academic infrastructure. When planning the establishment of an art research institute in Japan in the 1920s, art historian Yukio Yashiro (1890–1975) proposed a library centered on photographic reproductions, inspired by major Western institutions such as Germany's Staatliche Bildstelle, France's Archive photographique, Sir Robert Witt's photographic collection in London, the Frick Art Reference Library in New York, and Jacques Doucet's Bibliothèque d'art et d'archéologie.¹⁸ This concept led to the founding of the Imperial Art Research Institute in 1930, the predecessor of the Tokyo National Research Institute for Cultural Properties.¹⁹ Later, photographic collections were developed at the Nara National Museum Buddhist Art Research Center (founded in 1980)²⁰ and the Tokyo National Museum Archives (founded in 1984),²¹ but such collections were never fully institutionalized in university art history departments. Instead, slides were individually produced for lectures and seminars, then treated as personal property, with no mechanism for long-term preservation or sharing.

Photographs and Digital Resources as Historical Evidence

Overseas, photographic materials are increasingly recognized as primary research materials with

their own historical and material significance. The 2009 Florence Declaration, published by the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut, emphasizes that photographs are not merely reproductions but physical objects with their own materiality and history. Mounting methods, annotations, and institutional provenance all constitute essential information that must be preserved and documented.²² This perspective has led fourteen major international photographic collections to form the consortium Pharos: The International Consortium of Photo Archives, advancing collaborative digitization and research while preserving these contextual layers of information.²³ Participating institutions include the Bibliotheca Hertziana Max-Planck-Institut für Kunstgeschichte (Rome), the Courtauld Institute of Art with the Witt Library (London), Deutsches Dokumentationszentrum für Kunstgeschichte – Bildarchiv Foto Marburg, the Frick Art Reference Library (New York), the Getty Research Institute (Los Angeles), and the National Gallery of Art (Washington).

In Japan, however, photographic materials are still largely treated as images rather than as historical knowledge objects. This limited view reflects broader patterns in how Japan manages scholarly information more generally. In online dictionaries and databases, for example, metadata such as data creation date, authorship, source institution, and revision history are often neglected, limiting the materials' use as objective and verifiable resources. More problematically, an implicit emphasis on “currency” and “accuracy” creates a com-

pulsion to always present the newest information. This often leads to overwriting existing data without preserving earlier states or documenting revision history. Such practices reflect a fundamental misunderstanding: that older information loses value rather than constituting essential historical evidence. Establishing a culture of information literacy that records “this was the state at this point in time,” acknowledges authorship, and preserves the accumulation of knowledge over time—remains underdeveloped in Japan. These deficiencies indicate that the lag in digital infrastructure for Japanese art stems not only from technical limitations but also from the absence of institutional frameworks that value the continuity, verifiability, and historical layering of knowledge as a social resource.

Professional networks and associations have also played important roles in fostering systematic scholarly infrastructure in Western contexts. Organizations such as ARLIS/NA, ARLIS/UK & Ireland,²⁴ and the Art Libraries Section of IFLA,²⁵ alongside specialized journals like *Art Libraries Journal*, *Visual Resources*, and *Art Documentation*, have sustained collaborative efforts that continuously refine information management standards across institutions.

Japan established the Japan Art Documentation Society²⁶ in 1986 following the IFLA World Library and Information Congress in Tokyo. JADS has made valuable contributions to promoting art documentation and fostering a culture of information sharing. However, reflecting the broader knowledge management patterns identified by Nemoto and

Yamazaki, the focus has centered on general accessibility and broad sharing rather than on building specialized scholarly infrastructure with professional-grade standards. Development of academic-level information systems—with rigorous metadata standards, systematic cataloguing practices, and research-oriented platforms serving scholarly and curatorial needs—has received less attention and institutional support. As a result, while awareness of information sharing has grown, cross-institutional databases, professional standards, and collaborative platforms at the level required for advanced research and international curatorial work remain less established than in Western countries.

Collection Documentation and Institutions

Documentation of artwork information in museums also exhibits similar institutional inadequacies. Nemoto’s observations are suggestive here. In America, rational knowledge and information management systems are required in organizational operations, and generated documents are managed along timelines, thereby being utilized for organizational evaluation and as historical materials.²⁷ This importance became widely recognized in Japan only after the enactment of the Public Records Management Act in 2009.²⁸ Japan’s insufficient understanding of the significance of records management and documentation is thus intimately connected with the lag in collection documentation at museums.

In Europe and North America, unified standards for artwork infor-

mation management transcending institutional types and regions have been established, such as *SPECTRUM* by the UK's Collections Trust²⁹ and *Categories for the Description of Works of Art* (CDWA) by the J. Paul Getty Trust and College Art Association in the United States.³⁰ However, even in Europe and North America, maintaining consistent standards across diverse institutional contexts presents ongoing challenges. Financial constraints, technological transitions, and variations in institutional capacity mean that such ideal practices are not universally achieved. The experiences and difficulties documented in Western database projects offer valuable lessons for avoiding similar pitfalls in Japanese initiatives. In Japan, while these international standards were introduced as international trends, they never took root in museum practice. Consequently, no unified standards for record management processes or information management items were formed; collection information management methods differ by institution, procedures are not clarified, and incomplete management conditions are sometimes observed.³¹ As a result, artwork data from Japanese museums available online is extremely limited.

Access to artwork information and related materials is essential from the initial conceptual stages of exhibition planning. Curator Adrian George positions exhibition-making as an intellectual process beginning with the refinement of themes and collection of artwork information, noting that compiling lists of candidate works and identifying their locations and owners should begin with gathering as much information as possible from reliable online

sources, such as auction records, exhibition catalogs, museum websites, and monographs, before contacting the owners or lenders.³² However, artwork information provided by Japanese museums is currently extremely limited, making it exceedingly difficult for overseas curators and researchers to systematically collect information about Japanese art online.

Under these circumstances, in April 2022, the Museum Act³³ was revised for the first time in approximately 70 years, explicitly stipulating the creation and publication of records concerning museum collections as museum activities. This revision represents an important step toward promoting collection documentation efforts domestically and eventually enabling connection with international research environments. Yet establishing collection records management as official museum business still faces many challenges, including resolving the structural issues described above, establishing specialized operations, and securing personnel and budgets.

Origins and Objectives of Art Platform Japan (APJ)

In this context, Art Platform Japan (APJ) represents a concrete effort to develop information infrastructure in Japan. The Study Group on International Dissemination of Contemporary Art, convened in 2014 by Japan's Agency for Cultural Affairs, identified critical structural challenges: while Japan had consistently produced internationally recognized contemporary artists, particularly since the postwar period, their evaluation remained

dependent on Western-led frameworks. Despite dedicated efforts by private galleries and individual curators, such support had reached its limits. The Study Group recognized that advancing international dissemination required governmental coordination to address systemic deficiencies in research infrastructure, research documentation, and support mechanisms.³⁴

Building on these recommendations, APJ extended its temporal scope beyond the Study Group's contemporary art focus to encompass modern art from the Meiji period onward, recognizing that understanding contemporary Japanese art requires historical context rooted in Japan's modernization process. The Study Group's report highlighted inadequate dissemination of information to overseas art professionals and recommended creating a specialized organization for comprehensive visualization of artwork information, archive development, and international network building. As a medium- to long-term goal, the report proposed establishing a "Contemporary Art Promotion Support Organization" to oversee information dissemination, human resource development, and research.³⁵ APJ focuses specifically on the information dissemination aspect, establishing intellectual infrastructure allowing curators and researchers worldwide to access and utilize information on Japanese art efficiently.

Following this report, the Agency for Cultural Affairs launched the "Art Platform Project"³⁶ in 2018 as a five-year plan. This project implemented workshops for network building with overseas specialists,

translation of postwar Japanese art literature and criticism, and database construction usable by domestic and international specialists, promoting international dissemination of contemporary Japanese art information. In 2021, "Art Platform Japan" opened as a portal site, and systematic collection of workshop records and museum collection information began.

NCAR and APJ as Intellectual Infrastructure

Although the Agency for Cultural Affairs' Art Platform Project was initially planned to conclude after five years, some of its functions were transferred to the newly established National Center for Art Research (NCAR),³⁷ headquartered within the Independent Administrative Institution National Museum of Art. Founded in March 2023, NCAR appointed curator Mami Kataoka as its first director and adopted the mission of "Connecting, Deepening, and Expanding Art." The organization operates on four pillars: promoting the utilization of museum collections, compiling and disseminating information on art in Japan, developing international relations and networks, and enhancing learning.³⁸ Of these, the compilation and dissemination of information on art in Japan focuses on gathering and publishing data on modern and contemporary Japanese art that was disorganized, establishing a foundation for international research.

NCAR does not maintain a physical location and functions primarily online, with APJ, inherited from the Agency for Cultural Affairs, forming its core. "Art Platform Japan" was originally the name of the Agency

for Cultural Affairs' project; when NCAR inherited the website, the organization adopted this name for the website itself and redefined it as a research portal for modern and contemporary Japanese art. Whereas workshops and event information had been disseminated under the Agency's management, the structure was reorganized to center on information resources. Today, APJ provides databases, research guides, and bibliographies in both Japanese and English, serving as a starting point for specialized research and as a resource for hard-to-find information. Its users extend beyond Japanese art specialists to include curators, researchers, art professionals, university faculty, and students, reflecting its accessibility irrespective of specific expertise.

APJ is operated by NCAR's Research Resources Group, funded through the operational budget of the Independent Administrative Institution National Museum of Art. The Group coordinates data collection from cooperating museums throughout Japan while providing centralized data processing, standardization, and technical infrastructure. This collaborative model enables growth within resource constraints, though long-term sustainability depends on sustained institutional support and expanding museum partnerships.

APJ as a Research Portal

APJ functions as a response to the cultural and institutional challenges posed by limited infrastructure for Japanese art information. It integrates resources from museums and research institutions across Japan, addressing the deficiencies dis-

cussed earlier—the lack of bibliographic references, underdeveloped *catalogues raisonnés*, and insufficient documentation practices. By maintaining temporal transparency and preserving historical context, APJ creates an environment where curators and researchers can efficiently access foundational materials, thus contributing to intellectual infrastructure that underpins both exhibition practice and art research while facilitating international understanding of Japanese art.

A key factor in this effort is enabling information access in English. APJ presents artist names and document titles through Romanization rather than direct English translation. While it is often assumed in Japan that English translation is essential for international dissemination, translation burdens and inconsistencies can impede information sharing. NCAR therefore adopts Romanization, following guidelines such as those of the Library of Congress,³⁹ to allow users direct access to data without needing to input Japanese text or navigate varied translated terms. In many cases, transliteration alone ensures clear and accessible communication.

Below, we examine the four major databases comprising APJ—(1) SHŪZŌ, aggregating museum collection data nationwide; (2) Contemporary Japanese Art Exhibitions from 1945, recording postwar exhibition information; (3) Japanese Galleries and Art Spaces, organizing domestic gallery information; and (4) Dictionary of Artists in Japan (DAJ), containing artist and organization information—examining their structure, purposes, and functions.

These databases operate inde-

pendently yet are constructed to support diverse practices including research, exhibition planning, and studies through designs enabling cross-referencing. All records clearly indicate unique IDs and varying levels of metadata—including data provenance (source institution and provision date), publication dates, and modification history where available. This structure supports academic citation and verification while enhancing accessibility for researchers worldwide.

(1) Japanese Museum Collections Search (SHŪZŌ)

SHŪZŌ aggregates information on artworks held by museums and related institutions throughout Japan, with a primary focus on modern and contemporary works. The database functions as a living repository, continuously expanding with new collections and participating institutions.

SHŪZŌ's major strength lies in its flexible approach to data collection. Many Japanese museums face challenges in cataloging and documenting their collections, often lacking the capacity to provide publishable digital data. Earlier attempts to construct nationwide cultural heritage databases⁴⁰ depended on institutions providing standardized digital data, which limited progress when museums could not meet these requirements.

SHŪZŌ fundamentally reverses this model by accepting materials in whatever format museums can provide—published data, unprocessed datasets, or printed catalogs. NCAR then assumes the labor-intensive work of integrating and organizing this diverse information into a

unified database, allowing institutions with limited resources to participate and making formerly inaccessible collections available. This approach has proven remarkably effective: within just five years of its launch, SHŪZŌ surpassed 440,000 records, exceeding the scale of earlier nationwide cultural heritage databases.

During the data processing and publication stages, NCAR formats and cleans the data, assigns searchable keywords for artist names and museum names (see Dictionary of Artists in Japan section below), and publishes the integrated data online. While SHŪZŌ does not enforce full standardization of vocabulary or descriptive formats, this keyword assignment enhances searchability, enabling access to artwork information that was unavailable and providing new ways to visualize Japanese art materials. Importantly, SHŪZŌ dates all information and records revision history, treating data as time-stamped records rather than prioritizing currency alone.

To enhance international accessibility, SHŪZŌ implements AI-powered automatic translation for artist names and artwork titles. This addresses a critical barrier: Japanese museums often lack the resources to provide bilingual information, limiting international access to their collections. While artist names and museum names receive controlled bilingual keywords to ensure consistency, machine translation provides English versions of artwork titles. Though translation accuracy has limitations, this approach significantly broadens international access to previously Japanese-only collection information.

Thus, SHŪZŌ plays an important role as digital infrastructure for Japanese art, making fragmented museum collection information searchable across institutions for curators and researchers worldwide. A future challenge is the still-low rate of image inclusion. More artwork images need to be registered and published to create a truly comprehensive visual resource.

(2) Contemporary Japanese Art Exhibitions from 1945

Another key APJ resource is the exhibition database, which documents contemporary Japanese art exhibitions from the end of World War II to the present. Domestic exhibition data is collected by art information specialist Masatoshi Nakajima, while overseas exhibition information is gathered by art historian Kiyoko Mitsuyama, and the database integrates both datasets.

Notably, the database prioritizes exhibition catalogs, which are crucial primary sources for tracing artwork provenance and critical history. Unlike regular publications, catalogs are considered grey literature (materials produced outside traditional publishing channels) making bibliographic information difficult to obtain through standard library systems. APJ is progressively collecting and organizing catalog data, making these previously hard-to-access resources increasingly available for reference.

Historical efforts to organize exhibition information include the Tokyo National Research Institute for Cultural Properties' *Yearbook of Japanese Art*,⁴¹ which has continuously compiled domestic and internation-

al exhibition records since 1936. Originally published in print, this data has been digitized and made available online. The yearbook has long served as an essential resource for domestic researchers. In parallel, the National Art Center, Tokyo, which operates as a Kunsthalle (exhibition hall) without a permanent collection, gathers data on exhibitions nationwide, maintaining it in the *Art Commons* database⁴² after each exhibition concludes.

However, these existing digital resources remain primarily in Japanese, limiting international accessibility. A notable exception is the overseas exhibition database compiled by the Tokyo National Research Institute for Cultural Properties in collaboration with the Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Cultures (SISJAC). This portion documents exhibitions and film festivals held primarily in Europe and North America and is searchable in English, while domestic exhibition records remain accessible only in Japanese.

APJ's exhibition database complements these resources by enhancing international accessibility through bilingual searchable keywords and Romanized metadata. Though full bilingual coverage is in progress, this approach improves discoverability for international users while existing databases continue to serve domestic researchers. These resources are designed to function complementarily, though some information overlap exists among data held by the Tokyo National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, the National Art Center, Tokyo, and APJ. Establishing frameworks for role division and integrated op-

eration among institutions remains an important challenge.

(3) Japanese Galleries and Art Spaces

Another APJ resource is the database of Japanese galleries and art spaces. Its construction drew on documentary sources, including the 1957 to 2006 issues of *Bijutsu Nenkan* (Art Yearbook), an annual special issue of the art periodical *Bijutsu Techō*,⁴³ as well as various online sources. It records essential information such as founding years, ownership, operational history, and changes in location, enabling researchers to trace artwork provenance through gallery histories.

While Europe and North America have developed systematic databases documenting past galleries and archival materials, Japan has lagged behind in this regard. This database addresses that gap, providing both domestic and international curators and researchers with a structured environment to understand the history of Japanese galleries and the circulation of artworks. It is expected to serve as a foundational resource for international art research in the future.

(4) Dictionary of Artists in Japan (DAJ)

The resources discussed thus far—museum collections, exhibitions, and gallery databases—were initially constructed under the Agency for Cultural Affairs, focusing on “things” and “events” such as artworks and exhibitions. Yet for exhibition conceptualization and art historical research, “people”—namely, artists—are equally fundamental.

Recognizing this gap, NCAR developed the Dictionary of Artists in Japan to address the human dimension of Japanese art. Existing English-language academic dictionaries of Japanese artists were outdated,⁴⁴ making a new, accessible online resource essential.

NCAR addressed this need by creating the Dictionary of Artists in Japan (DAJ), which standardizes and organizes artist information. The database covers artists and organizations contributing to Japanese cultural and artistic development from the Meiji era onward, including those active from 1868 to artists born before 1995. Entries vary in detail: some include biographical information, major exhibitions, museum holdings, and selected bibliography, while others provide basic identification. With approximately 5,200 records, DAJ integrates variant name forms and hereditary names, providing stable and reliable access to artist information. DAJ also connects to international authority files: VIAF (Virtual International Authority File),⁴⁵ a personal name authority file constructed through cooperation among national libraries worldwide, and ULAN (Union List of Artist Names),⁴⁶ an artist name authority file by the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles.

Beyond serving as a reference resource, DAJ functions as the controlled vocabulary system for APJ—the standardized keyword mechanism mentioned earlier in the SHŪZŌ section. In both SHŪZŌ and the exhibition database, while original Japanese forms and variant forms in source data are preserved, an authority heading assignment mechanism using DAJ artist head-

ings enables unified reference to works and exhibition records of the same artist. This controlled vocabulary approach improves search accuracy and information integration across APJ's databases.

The case of Tsuguharu Foujita illustrates this challenge. His name appears in museum records as "Tsuguharu Fujita," "Foujita Tsuguharu," "Léonard Foujita," and numerous other variants, with many institutions recording works only in Japanese. Before authority control, these variations caused systematic search failures: researchers could not locate all works by the same artist.

DAJ resolves this by establishing a unified authority heading for Foujita while preserving all name variants. Figure 2 shows Foujita's DAJ entry, displaying the range of name variations registered in the system. Each collection record in SHŪZŌ then links to this authority heading. Figure 3 shows a work by Foujita in SHŪZŌ, where both the original artist name provided by the contributing museum and the standardized APJ search keyword are visible. This linkage ensures comprehensive results regardless of which name form users search. Whether users search for "Fujita Tsuguharu" or "Léonard Foujita," all of his works appear in search results, allowing comprehensive tracking of artwork locations and exhibition histories.

A more complex case involves artists with hereditary names. The Kiyomizu family of ceramicists has successively inherited the name "Rokubei" since the Edo period. The eighth-generation Kiyomizu Rokubei (born Kiyomizu Masahiro, 1954–) is currently active. Museum records often mix personal and he-

reditary names with inconsistent formats: "Kiyomizu Rokubei (VIII)," "Kiyomizu Masahiro," "KIYOMIZU Rokubei VIII," and other variants.

DAJ addresses this by registering both the personal and hereditary names in authority records,⁴⁷ allowing cross-referencing. Works recorded under "Kiyomizu Masahiro" are linked to "Kiyomizu Rokubei VIII," so searches return all works by the same artist regardless of which name is used. This approach accommodates Japan's unique hereditary naming system within an international authority framework.

APJ in Practice: Early Applications in Exhibition Planning

APJ serves as information infrastructure for exhibitions, research, and studies, aggregating data from multiple Japanese art databases. The databases function as tools for curatorial research during the initial stages of exhibition planning, as highlighted by Matassa and George.⁴⁸ They provide systematic curatorial support in conceptual stages, including defining exhibition themes, compiling artwork wish lists, and verifying artwork locations and ownership.

Through APJ's aggregation of information, collections in regional museums that were previously difficult to access are now available for reference and loan in international exhibitions. Museums have reported that making their collections searchable through SHŪZŌ led to loan inquiries. For instance, one museum noted that basic information on previously unpublished works, once made publicly available, attracted loan requests from

ART PLATFORM JAPAN
Research Portal by NCAR

Databases ▾ Research Guides ▾ About ▾ 日本語

Home > Dictionary of Artists in Japan (DAJ) > FOUJITA Tsuguharu

APJ A1852

藤田嗣治 | 1886-11-27 | 1968-01-29
FOUJITA Tsuguharu | 1886-11-27 | 1968-01-29

Names	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 藤田嗣治 FOUJITA Tsuguharu (index name) Foujita Tsuguharu (display name) 藤田嗣治 (Japanese display name) ふじた つぐはる (transliterated hiragana) Fujita Tsuguharu (transliterated Roman) Léonard Foujita レオナルド・フジタ Foujita Tsugouharu 	<p>Continue searching</p> <p>Japanese Museum Collections Search (SHŪZŌ)</p> <p>FOUJITA Tsuguharu : 703</p> <p>Contemporary Japanese Art Exhibitions from 1945</p> <p>FOUJITA Tsuguharu : 11</p>
Date of birth	1886-11-27	<p>Share Metadata Citation</p> <p>PDF</p>
Birth place	Ushigome-ku, Tokyo Prefecture	
Date of death	1968-01-29	
Death place	Zurich, Switzerland	

Fig. 2: Screenshot of the entry on Tsuguharu Foujita in the Dictionary of Artists in Japan, displaying registered name variants. <https://artplatform.go.jp/artists/A1852>

Fig. 3: Screenshot showing a work by Tsuguharu Foujita in SHŪZŌ. Through authority control, works are unified under a single heading regardless of name variations in the original dataset. <https://artplatform.go.jp/collections/W781269>

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Back Translation

APJ W781269

猫
藤田嗣治
FUJITA, Tsuguharu

Artist	藤田嗣治 FUJITA, Tsuguharu	Artists	FOUJITA Tsuguharu
Title	猫 Cat	Museums	Okawa Museum of Art
Year	1941年(昭和16)	Continue searching	<p>Japanese Museum Collections Search (SHŪZŌ)</p> <p>FOUJITA Tsuguharu : 703</p> <p>Okawa Museum of Art : 7133</p>
Medium	水彩、インク・紙	Share Metadata Citation	PDF
Dimensions/duration	23.0×31.5		
Dimensions unit	cm		
Collection	大川美術館 Okawa Museum of Art		
Accession number	フ06-02		

overseas curators.

This visualization of information enables the reassessment of regional museum collections both domestically and internationally, supporting the presentation of diverse developments in Japanese art on a global stage. It also enhances practical tasks such as exhibition preparation, location verification, provenance research, and literature searches, demonstrating APJ's role as a practical tool for curatorial work, beyond its function as a database.

Conclusion

Art Platform Japan (APJ) aims to enhance the visibility and international dissemination of Japanese art by providing reliable information on modern and contemporary artworks and domestic collections. Japanese art research has long faced structural challenges, including fragmented information resources, incomplete collection documentation, and limited international exposure. As Nemoto and Yamazaki note, Japan has underdeveloped institutional frameworks for socially accumulating and circulating knowledge, resulting in delayed organization and sharing of art information.

In contrast, Europe and North America have long-established systems for integrating and standardizing artwork and artist information, while Japan's mechanisms remain insufficient. Valuable domestic resources often remain inaccessible internationally due to language barriers and lack of standardization.

APJ's fundamental strength lies in its function as an index to accumu-

lated information, regardless of age or previous accessibility. Rather than privileging the newest data, APJ treats older records and previously unpublished materials as valuable components of the historical record. By integrating and standardizing data from multiple domestic institutions while enabling international access through bilingual keywords and Romanization, APJ makes decades of formerly fragmented resources searchable and usable. This approach represents a fundamental departure from the prevalent practice of overwriting data to present only "current" content, thereby discarding rather than preserving knowledge.

Early impacts are already visible: regional museum collections are being referenced and loaned in exhibitions, once-obscure materials are now utilized, and artist information integration has improved research efficiency for scholars and curators worldwide.

While digital resources such as *ukiyo-e.org* and Ritsumeikan University's databases on Japanese art abroad have contributed valuable documentation of earlier periods, APJ focuses specifically on modern and contemporary art from the Meiji period onward, addressing distinct research needs and scholarly frameworks. Future development may explore metadata interoperability to facilitate connections across Japanese art information platforms.

Looking forward, APJ must address interconnected challenges: expanding image coverage, completing exhibition and bibliographic records, and establishing coordination frameworks with existing institutions to prevent redundancy and

enable efficient resource allocation. Beyond these practical tasks lies a deeper institutional question: how can Japan develop a sustainable culture of knowledge infrastructure that values continuity, verifiability, and historical layering? Long-term success requires cultivating information literacy that recognizes accumulated information, not just the newest data, as essential infrastructure for preserving knowledge over time.

As “Tools for Tomorrow’s Exhibitions,” APJ represents not merely a database but a model for reconceptualizing how societies construct and circulate art historical knowledge. By making searchable not only current data but also historical records, unpublished materials, and once-fragmented resources, APJ demonstrates that information’s value lies not in its newness but in its contribution to the continuous accumulation of knowledge. It serves as shared infrastructure supporting future exhibitions and academic research while enhancing the global visibility of Japanese art through comprehensive access to its informational heritage.

This article develops arguments first presented at the 35th EAJRS Conference in Heidelberg, Germany, September 2025. The original conference paper is available at:

https://www.eajrs.net/files/happyo/kawaguchi_masako_25.pdf.

Endnotes:

- 1 Turner 2014, pp. 4–5.
- 2 Turner 2014, pp. 4–5.
- 3 Turner 2014, p. 6.
- 4 Matassa 2014, pp. 3–4, 6.
- 5 First published in the French language in three volumes between 1911 and 1923.
- 6 First published in the German language in 37 volumes between 1907 and 1950.
- 7 Published in 32 volumes between 1929 and 1984 as a printed index of art periodicals.
- 8 Published between 1975 and 2007 as a printed index and abstract of European and American visual arts.
- 9 Keyes, Morse 2015; Keyes, Clark 2020, pp. 86–87, 97–98. The ninety-volume typescript of the *catalogue raisonné* of the surviving single-sheet prints of Katsushika Hokusai, edited jointly by Keyes and Morse, was donated to the British Museum and is held in the Archive of the Japanese Section, Department of Asia. It has been digitized by the Art Research Center, Ritsumeikan University, and is available for online viewing. <https://www.dh-jac.net/db1/booksrsk/search.php>.
- 10 <https://artplatform.go.jp/>.
- 11 Nemoto 2011, pp. 19.
- 12 Nemoto 2011, pp. 18.
- 13 Nemoto 2011, pp. 19.
- 14 Yamazaki 2008, pp. 99–101.
- 15 Kawakita 1989.
- 16 <https://www.catalogueraison.org/>.
- 17 <https://icra.art/>.
- 18 Yashiro 1932, p. 3.
- 19 <https://www.tobunken.go.jp/>.
- 20 <https://www.narahaku.go.jp/english/guide/center/>.
- 21 https://www.tnm.jp/modules/r_free_page/index.php?id=138&lang=en.
- 22 Recommendations for the Preservation of Analogue Photo Archives. <https://www.khi.fi.it/en/photothek/florence-declaration.php>.
- 23 <https://pharosartresearch.org/>.
- 24 ARLIS/NA (Art Libraries Society of North America) and ARLIS/UK & Ireland are independent professional organizations dedicated to art librarianship.
- 25 IFLA Art Libraries Section, see <https://www.ifla.org/units/art-libraries/>.
- 26 <https://www.jads.org/>.
- 27 Nemoto 2011, p. 8.
- 28 Nemoto 2011, pp. 8–9.
- 29 <https://collectionstrust.org.uk/spectrum/>.
- 30 <https://www.getty.edu/publications/categories-description-works-art/>.
- 31 Kanayama 2024, p. 164.
- 32 George 2015, p. 92.

- 33 <https://laws.e-gov.go.jp/law/326AC1000000285>.
- 34 https://www.bunka.go.jp/seisaku/bunkashingikai/kondankaito/gendaibijutsu_kaigaihasshin/.
- 35 https://www.bunka.go.jp/seisaku/bunkashingikai/kondankaito/gendaibijutsu_kaigaihasshin/pdf/kentokai_ronri.pdf.
- 36 https://www.bunka.go.jp/seisaku/bunka_gyosei/artplatform/index.html.
- 37 <https://ncar.artmuseums.go.jp/>.
- 38 <https://ncar.artmuseums.go.jp/about/>.
- 39 Library of Congress 2022.
- 40 <https://bunka.nii.ac.jp/db/>.
- 41 https://tobunken.repo.nii.ac.jp/search?search_type=2&q=873; <https://www.tobunken.go.jp/archives/information-search/art-exhibitons/?lang=en>; <https://www.tobunken.go.jp/archives/information-search/art-exhibitions-and-film-festivals-held-outside-of-japan/?lang=en>.
- 42 <https://www.nact.jp/english/artcommons/user/index>.
- 43 *Bijutsu Techō* is a monthly magazine published by Bijutsu Shuppansha, which also issued an extra issue titled *Bijutsu Nenkan* [Yearbook of Art]. <https://search.worldcat.org/ja/title/838741533>.
- 44 Roberts 1976; Tazawa 1981.
- 45 <https://viaf.org/en>.
- 46 <https://www.getty.edu/research/tools/vocabularies/ulan/>.
- 47 <https://artplatform.go.jp/artists/A1322>.
- 48 Matassa 2014, p. 6; George 2015, pp. 88–92.

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