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The exhibitions in Japan:

Historical perspectives and contemporary relevance

Edited by: Naoki Sato

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dossier.

09 **The Genealogy of Japanese Museums: From the Shōsōin Treasury in Nara to the Östasiatiska Museet in Stockholm**

Naoki Sato

035 **Establishment of a Museum in Modern Japan: From the Perspective of the Influence of the South Kensington Museum**

Hitomi Inoue

061 **Japanese Museums: Challenges, Prospects, and a Life-Death Perspective on Cultural Inheritance**

Ryō Furuta

081 **Community-Based Museum and Intangible Cultural Resources: From the Perspective of the Concept of Post-Museum**

Hiroya Ichikawa

113 **Text as Narration: Exhibition Texts and Regimes of Art in Contemporary Japan**

Misato Shimazu

133 **The Formation of the Collection and Exhibition History of the National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo**

Shinsuke Watanabe, Nagako Kakehi

159 **An Examination of Museology in Japan: Current Trends and Future Directions**

Hidenori Kurita

177 **Patronage, Industry, and Institution: A Genealogy of Privately Funded Museums and Contemporary Art in Japan**

Mami Kataoka

sections.

203 **Experience and Publics**

From Passive Viewers to Active Curators: Rethinking Museum Education through Youth Engagement

Ayako Umemura

219 **Digital Technologies for Cultural Heritage**

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

Masako Kawaguchi

241 **Architecture and Displays**

Corporate Art Museums in Japan

Robert Maximilian Woitschützke

255 **Behind the scenes**

Career Transitions for Museum Curators in Japan: A Case Study

Mari Watanabe

materials.

275 **Shomei Tomatsu's Hikōki (Airplane): Rediscovery and Archival of the 16mm Film**

Tomoko Araki

305 **Exhibiting Japan: Displays and Narratives of Japanese Graphic Design in Paris and Bologna**

Federico Maria Giorgi, Alessandro Paolo Lena



dossier.



The Genealogy of Japanese Museums: From the Shōsōin Treasury in Nara to the Östasiatiska Museet in Stockholm

Naoki Sato

Keywords:
Shōsōin; Kunstkammer; Global Art History; Exhibition Ideology; Japanese Aesthetics ("Ma")

ABSTRACT:

This paper re-examines the Shōsōin from a global perspective, comparing it with the Western "Kunstkammer" to clarify differences in their functions and ideologies. While the Dresden Kunstkammer, established by Elector August of Saxony, aimed for an encyclopedic visualization of world order through the systematic classification of natural and man-made objects, the Shōsōin's primary characteristic lies in its long-term sealing and non-public nature. For over a millennium, the Shōsōin preserved the cherished items of Emperor Shōmu, maintaining the "sacredness" of the Imperial family. The study further explores the intersection of Eastern and Western exhibition ideologies by tracing the influence of Japanese aesthetics on the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities in Stockholm. Crown Prince Gustaf Adolf's 1926 visit to the Shōsōin and the subsequent adoption of Japanese spatial concepts, such as "ma" (interval), by Director Bo Gyllensvärd, mark a transition from "exotic decoration" to a serene, subjective viewing experience. Ultimately, the Shōsōin's evolution from a sacred treasury to a modern cultural property demonstrates a unique circulation of spirituality and aesthetics in global art history.

Il presente contributo riesamina il deposito dello Shōsōin da una prospettiva globale, confrontandolo con la "Kunstkammer" occidentale al fine di chiarirne le differenze fondamentali in termini di funzioni e ideologie. Mentre la Kunstkammer di Dresda, istituita dall'Elettore Augusto di Sassonia, mirava a una visualizzazione enciclopedica dell'ordine mondiale attraverso la classificazione sistematica di oggetti naturali e artificiali, la caratteristica primaria dello Shōsōin risiede nella sua natura non pubblica e nella sua rigorosa sigillatura a lungo termine. Per oltre un millennio, lo Shōsōin ha preservato i beni preziosi dell'imperatore Shōmu, mantenendo intatta la "sacralità" della famiglia imperiale. Lo studio esplora inoltre l'intersezione tra le ideologie espositive orientali e occidentali, ripercorrendo l'influenza dell'estetica giapponese sul Museo delle Antichità dell'Estremo Oriente di Stoccolma. La visita del principe ereditario Gustavo Adolfo allo Shōsōin nel 1926 e la successiva adozione di concetti spaziali giapponesi, come il "ma" (intervallo), da parte del direttore Bo Gyllensvärd, segnano una transizione cruciale dalla "decorazione esotica" a un'esperienza di visione serena e soggettiva. In definitiva, l'evoluzione dello Shōsōin da tesoro sacro a bene culturale moderno dimostra una circolazione unica di spiritualità ed estetica nella storia dell'arte globale.

Opening Picture:

Abraham and Wenzel Jamnitzer, Statuette of Daphne with Coral Tines, Silver, partially gilt, coral, enamel, late 16th century, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden.

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Introduction - The Dawn of Exhibitions in Japan

The first modern exhibition in Japan was the "Kyoto Exhibition," held in 1871 at Nishi Honganji Temple through the cooperation of Kyoto Prefecture and the private sector. The organizers were three wealthy merchants from Kyoto: Mitsui Hachirōemon, Ono Zensuke, and Kumaya Kyūbei. The duration was 33 days, from October 10 to November 11. The objective was to bring back the flow of people to Kyoto, which had lost its vitality due to the relocation of the capital to Tokyo. Although the movement of foreigners was restricted at the time, announcements were also made to residents of Tokyo, Yokohama, and Kobe. The exhibits consisted of 166 Japanese products, 131 Chinese products, and 39 Western products, totaling 336 items, and the number of visitors recorded was 11,455.[1]

In the following year, 1872, the "Yushima Seidō Exhibition," the first organized by the Ministry of Education in Tokyo, was held at the Taiseiden Hall of Yushima Seidō. This exhibition, larger in scale than the one in Kyoto, also served as preparation for the exhibits as the Meiji government was scheduled to participate for the first time in the 1873 Vienna World's Fair. The "Golden Shachihoko" (fig. 1) of Nagoya Castle, which had been presented to the Ministry of the Imperial Household, garnered immense popularity and was also displayed at the Vienna World's Fair. In addition, a total of 798 items were exhibited, including 18 imperial treasures dedicated to Yushima Seidō by the Tokugawa family, as well as antiques, specimens, and domestic products, and the total number of visitors reached 150,000. With an average of 3,000 visitors crowding in per day, the exhibition was so popular that its duration had to be extended by a month. For this reason, the Yushima Seidō Exhibition is often regarded as the precursor to full-fledged exhibitions that created the modern Japanese exhibition boom. Furthermore, because the Tokyo National Museum designates this exhibition as the year of its founding,[2] many studies unravel the history of museums in Japan starting from this exhibition; however, it must be corrected based on historical facts that the first exhibition in Japan was the Kyoto Exhibition.

When looking at the history of exhibitions, there is an unavoidable tendency to be bound by a critical awareness that modern Japan and Westernization are two sides of the same coin. However, in this paper, I would like to move beyond such a modern framework of exhibitions modeled after the West and consider the origins of Japanese museums from an art-historical and cultural-historical perspective. To that end, more than anything else, one should begin with the "Shōsōin" (fig. 2), an ancient Japanese treasury. This is because by relativizing the origins and history of Japanese museums, the genealogy of Japanese museums should become visible.

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Fig. 1: Golden Shachihoko (Tiger-headed carp), 1612 (destroyed by aerial bombardment in 1945), Nagoya Castle. Photo of staff of the Yushima Seidō Exposition in 1872 (taken by Yokoyama Matsusaburō). Photo credit: public domain (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Staff_of_the_Yushima_Seido_Exposition_in_Meiji_5.jpg).



Fig. 2: Shōsōin Treasure House, Nara. Photo credit: public domain (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Shosoin-shouso.jpg).

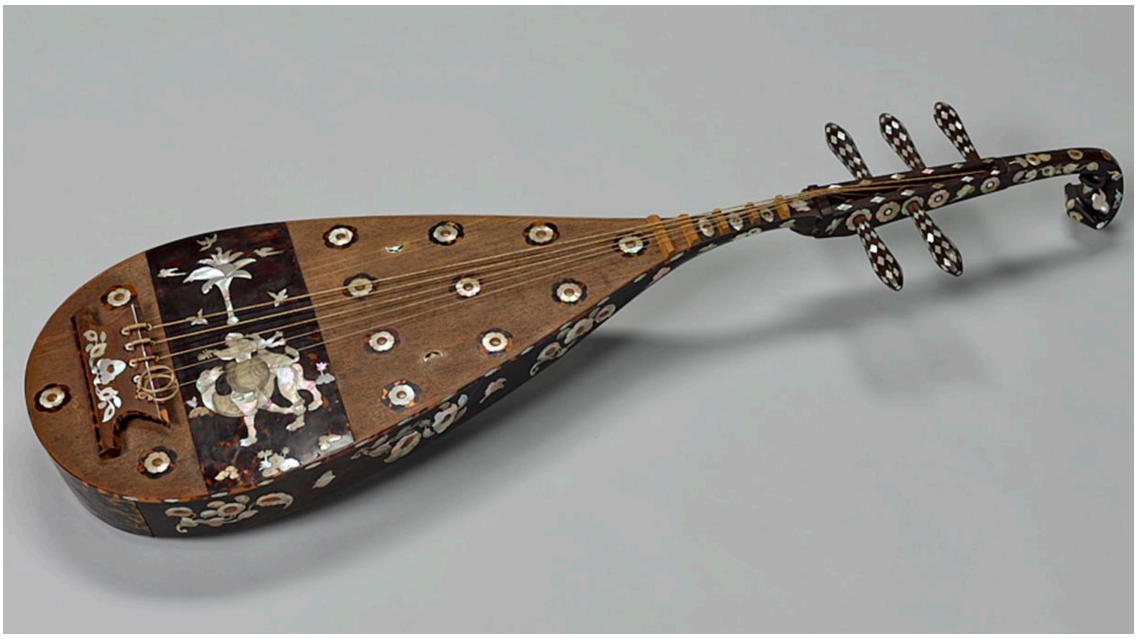
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The Shōsōin as the Origin of Japanese Museums

First, let us confirm the history of the Shōsōin and the characteristics of its collection. Located within the former precincts of Tōdaiji Temple in Nara, which was the capital of Japan until the end of the 8th century, it is currently a national institution under the administration of the Imperial Household Agency. In the 8th century, "Shōsō" (principal storehouses) were established in Buddhist temples and government offices throughout the country to house important items. Since "Shō" carries the meanings of "important" and "central," the single building that stands today as the Shōsōin is the one built at the center of the warehouse complex when Tōdaiji was founded as Japan's most central temple.[3] The frontage is approximately 33 meters, the depth is approximately 9.4 meters, the floor height is approximately 2.7 meters, and the total height is approximately 14 meters. Cypress was used in the wooden construction, and 40 floor pillars stand on foundation stones with a diameter of 60 centimeters. While the exact date of construction of this treasury is unknown, records indicate it was completed by March 759. The treasures housed therein were those offered to the Birushana Butsu (Great Buddha) of Tōdaiji on July 22, 756, the occasion of the forty-ninth-day memorial service of Emperor Shōmu, who founded Tōdaiji, and consisted of 650 items cherished by the Emperor and 60 types of medicines.

More than anything else, it is accurate to say that the primary characteristic of the Shōsōin lies in its "perpetual preservation." The items housed here are offerings to the Imperial family with clear origins and are rich in international flavor, befitting Nara as the terminus of the Silk Road. While there are examples of treasures dedicated to royal families for similar purposes, such as those from the Egyptian dynasties, these are ultimately burial goods, and there is no other instance in which items have been protected above ground.[4] Because the five volumes of the list of offerings (Kenmotsu-chō) by Empress Kōmyō have been handed down to the present day, it is globally rare to be able to verify which existing works correspond to which entries in the catalog based on name, quantity, dimensions, materials, techniques, and provenance, including missing items.[5] The treasures are diverse, including furnishings such as rugs, folding screens, mirrors, and fans; musical instruments such as the biwa, flute, and koto; game equipment such as *go* and *sugoroku*; as well as stationery, eating and drinking vessels, Buddhist ritual implements, and medicines. Many of these, such as the *Raden Shitan no Gogen Biwa* (Five-stringed *biwa* lute of red sandalwood with mother-of-pearl inlay) (fig. 3) and the *Hakururi no Wan* (White glass bowl), are imported goods, but some, including the *Torige Ritsujo no Byōbu* (Folding screen with figures of ladies under trees decorated with bird feathers), were produced in 8th-century Japan, and recent investigations suggest that armor and weapons are mostly of Japanese manufacture.[6] Regarding the total number of treasures, approximately 9,000 items are currently organized and confirmed, but since a single item may contain dozens or hundreds of pieces, the

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/23731



3

Fig.3: Raden Shitan no Gogen Biwa (Five-stringed *biwa* lute of red sandalwood with mother-of-pearl inlay), Shōsōin, Nara. Photo credit: Shosoin.

total reaches several hundred thousand.

The fact that the Shōsōin has been strictly managed with its doors sealed by the Emperor's "Chokufū" (Imperial Seal) is the greatest factor in how the treasures have been protected for over 1,250 years. However, several instances are known in which powerful figures of the time ordered the opening of the seal to view the treasures. This is thought to have carried a political meaning of displaying power sufficient to surpass that of the Imperial family. The first record of such an opening was on September 30, 1019, during the Heian period, by Fujiwara no Michinaga, who was at the pinnacle of aristocratic politics. Historical materials clarify that he dispatched a messenger to fetch the keys from Kyoto and that Tōdaiji officials and government officers inspected the treasures inside the warehouse.[7] While it is not explicitly stated what Michinaga specifically viewed, there is no doubt that he possessed a strong curiosity toward the treasures of the Nara period.

Particularly famous is the record of the cutting (sectioning) of the agarwood *Ōjukukō* (fig. 4) performed by the warrior class during the Muromachi period. This single piece of fragrant wood, also known by the name "Ranjatai," is a massive object measuring 156 centimeters in length and weighing 11.6 kilograms. Against the backdrop of the development of Kōdō (the Way of Incense), three generations of Shoguns from the Muromachi Shogunate enjoyed this world-renowned fragrance: Ashikaga Yoshimitsu in 1385, Yoshinori in 1429, and Yoshimasa in 1465. Furthermore, in 1574, Oda Nobunaga also performed a cutting. At first glance, these acts might appear to be destructive behavior deviating from the preservation of the treasures; however, the sections where the wood was cut are marked, and since the amounts removed were also small, it is inferred that a certain degree of respect for the Imperial family's treasures was maintained. In fact, at the time of the cutting, they followed the procedure of cutting two pieces and presenting

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/23731



4

one of them to the Emperor of the time.[8] Since Nobunaga, during the Edo period (17th–18th centuries) as well, inspections, repairs, and the organization of documents were performed several times by order of the Shogun, but no record remains of "Ranjatai" being cut.[9]

The last person to cut this "Ranjatai" was Emperor Meiji. According to the *Meiji Tennō Ki* (Chronicles of Emperor Meiji), during an Imperial visit to Nara on February 9, 1877, the Emperor viewed the treasures of the Shōsōin and ordered Machida Hisanari, Director of the Museum Bureau of the Home Ministry, to cut off 2 *sun* (approximately 6 centimeters). It is recorded that when the Emperor himself burned this upon returning to his temporary residence, a fragrant scent filled the surroundings.[10] Even though it was an "Imperial treasure," this event was an extremely important historical incident symbolizing the authority of Emperor Meiji as the head of a modern state.

Public Opening of the Shōsōin and Exhibitions

It was not until the Meiji period and thereafter that the Shōsōin came to be opened to the public. A major reason behind its opening by the Meiji government in 1872 was the urgent need to take measures for the preservation of ancient cultural properties, as the dispersal of treasures from temples in Nara and Kyoto had become an issue due to the *Haibutsu Kishaku* (anti-Buddhist movement) following the Meiji Restoration. With this unsealing as an opportunity, inspections and the creation of catalogs for the treasures were vigorously pursued. At the same time, an investigation into items for display at the 1873 Vienna World's Fair was conducted, but ultimately, no Shōsōin treasures were sent to Vienna.[11]

However, following the success of the Kyoto Exhibition, an exhibition was also planned in Nara, and with the holding of the "First Nara Exhibition" in 1875 at the Tōdaiji Great Buddha Hall and its cloisters as the

Fig. 4:
Ōjukukō, Incense wood, Shōsōin, Nara.
Photo credit: Shosoin.

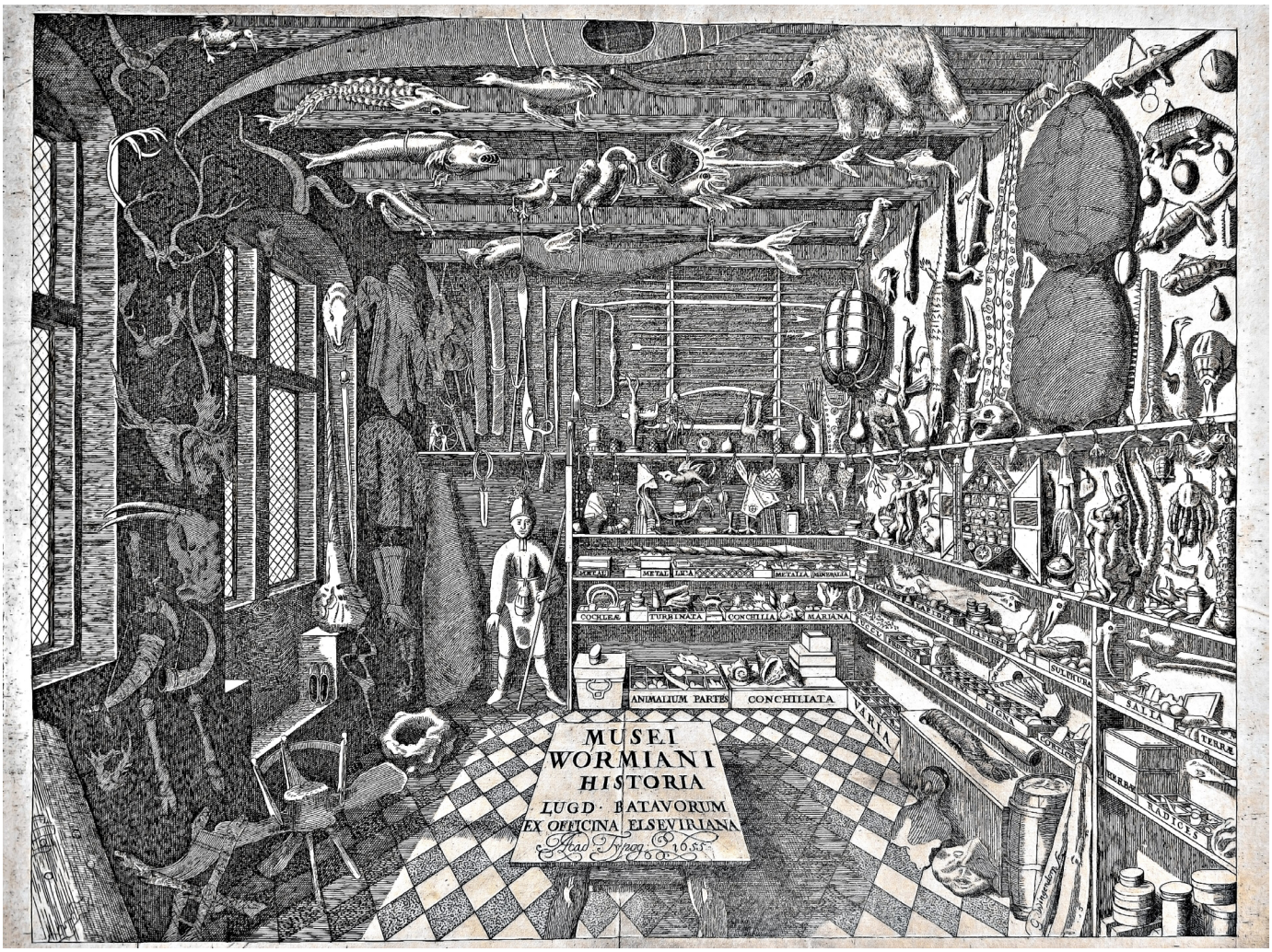
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venue, the treasures gained their first opportunity for public viewing. In the *Nara Hakurankai Buppin Mokuroku* (Nara Exhibition Item Catalog), it is noted that the majority of the items on display at the venue were imperial treasures from the Shōsōin treasury, and the *Ōjukukō* was included among the 220 exhibited items.[12] Similar to the previous Kyoto Exhibition and the Yushima Seidō Exhibition, while it possessed the character of an industrial exhibition, the fact that many Shōsōin treasures—which had never been shown to the common people—were exhibited became a topic of great interest, recording as many as 170,000 visitors during the 80-day session from March 1 to May 20. There had been no prior instance of so many people seeing the Shōsōin treasures, and through this, the existence of the Shōsōin became widely known both domestically and abroad.[13] The exhibits from the Shōsōin were treated as special from that time, and catalogs were specially produced. This can be called the origin of the "Shōsōin Exhibition" that began in 1946 and continues to the present day, and there is no doubt that the Nara Exhibition was the budding of a full-fledged "art exhibition" in Japan and a major turning point in museum history.

Thereafter, the Nara Exhibition was held 18 times until 1894, and the Shōsōin treasures were offered for public viewing a total of four times: the second in 1876, (the exhibition was not held in 1877 due to the Seinan Rebellion),[14] the third in 1878, and the fifth in 1880. However, because the exhibition environment was almost outdoors, damage occurred due to humidity and ultraviolet rays, and public opening was suspended from a preservation standpoint. In 1879, the minister of Home Affairs Itō Hirobumi proposed installing display shelves inside the treasury to balance preservation with public viewing while avoiding the movement of the treasures. In response to this, Kurokawa Mayori (1829-1906), a scholar of Japanese classics who was involved in the exhibition regulations for the Vienna World's Fair, took the lead in producing display shelves using cypress wood and German-made glass, making exhibition viewing inside the treasury possible in 1882.[15] During this period, in 1881 while display work was underway, it is recorded in a travelogue that Prince Albert Victor and Prince George (later George V) of the United Kingdom visited and were among the first to view them.[16] From 1883 onward, viewing was restricted to the time of the annual "Bakuryō" (airing) for administrative reasons, but special unsealings for foreign dignitaries were frequently performed.[17] In particular, when the Crown Prince of Sweden, Gustaf Adolf (later King Gustaf VI Adolf, 1882-1973), who specialized in archaeology, visited Japan in 1926, an intensive investigation of the treasures spanning three days was permitted.[18] This experience by Gustaf Adolf later became the key to the reception of Japanese art in Sweden.

In order for the general public to be able to view the treasures without their qualifications being questioned, one must wait for the special exhibition of the Shōsōin held at the Tokyo Imperial Household Museum in 1940. Despite the short duration of 20 days, it recorded an attendance of 400,000 people.[19] Thereafter, exhibitions of the Shōsōin

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/23731



5

were suspended due to World War II; however, in 1946, the idea of opening them to the general public emerged among influential figures in Nara who lamented that "a sense of humiliation from a national inferiority complex is spreading," and a petition was submitted to the Minister of the Imperial Household by Ono Shōichi, Chairman of the Nara Prefecture Tourism Association, on June 8.[20] In response to this, it was decided that the treasures, which had been evacuated for the sake of preservation, would be opened to the public when they were returned to the Shōsōin, and on October 18 of the same year, the "Special Viewing of Shōsōin Imperial Treasures" was held at the Nara Imperial Household Museum. Although it was initially planned as a one-time event, it was decided that it would also be held the following year due to comments from many visitors such as, "it gave me the courage to live."[21] Since then, with the exception of three special exhibitions in Tokyo, it has been held every autumn without fail to the present day. Every year, 60 to 70 strictly selected treasures are transported to and displayed at the Nara National Museum following the "Ceremony of Unsealing" held in October. The fact that there are treasures shown for the first time every year to the present day also speaks to the volume of the Shōsōin's collection.

Fig. 5: Wormius' cabinet of curiosities, Frontispiece of *Musei Wormiani Historia*, engraving, 1655. Photo credit: public domain(https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1655_-_Frontispiece_of_Museum_Wormiani_Historia.jpg).

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Kunstkammer and Shōsōin

In order to re-examine this genealogy of the Shōsōin, or the problematic system of museology, from a more global perspective, I would next like to attempt a comparison between the "Kunstkammer" (fig. 5), which represents the genealogy of treasuries in the West, and the Shōsōin. The monumental work by Krzysztof Pomian, *Le Musée, une histoire mondiale* (The World History of Museums and Art Galleries, 3 volumes), is known as a landmark study that describes the history of human collecting by expanding its scope from antiquity to modern Europe, and further to China and Japan. In particular, Volume 1, *Du trésor au musée* (From the Treasury to the Museum), was epoch-making in that it presented a comprehensive study of the "Kunstkammer"—cabinets of curiosities that flourished in courts north of the Alps from the 16th century onward—as the starting point of ancient treasuries.[22] According to this, the Kunstkammer is the archetype of treasuries in the West, and Pomian uses this as a starting point to discuss the development toward modern museums and art galleries.[23] Furthermore, Volume 3, *À la conquête du monde* (Conquest of the World), as the title suggests, overlooks the phenomenon of the global diffusion of the Western-style museum model from the 19th century onward, and can be evaluated as a pioneering achievement in global art history that also brings Japan and China into its scope. However, in this book, despite the name "Shōsōin" being mentioned twice, a full-scale comparative study is not conducted, and the discussion remains limited to touching upon the existence of the Imperial collection handed down for over a millennium.[24] The possibility that Pomian could not sufficiently access Japanese-language materials cannot be denied as a reason for this. Therefore, this paper aims to inherit the task that Pomian was unable to accomplish and clarify the functions fulfilled by Eastern and Western treasuries and the differences in their character by comparing the Kunstkammer and the Shōsōin.

As already confirmed, the fact that the Shōsōin was maintained in an "untouched" state from the 8th century to the 19th century is an extremely rare phenomenon even from a global perspective. On the other hand, what kind of character did the Kunstkammer, which developed from the treasuries of German princely nobility in the 16th century, possess? Here, I would like to take up the Kunstkammer of the Electors of Saxony as an object of comparison. The collection currently known as the "Green Vault" (Grünes Gewölbe) of the Dresden State Art Collections is a case worthy of comparison with the Shōsōin in terms of its scale and continuity to the present day. The starting point of the Elector of Saxony's collection lay in the passion for collecting tools by Augustus (1526–1586). It is said that a room named "Kunstkammer" was established in 1560, and upon the death of Augustus in February 1586, his son Christian I inherited it at the end of June the following year, 1857, and the first "Inventory (Inventar)" was created.[25] This inventory records over 7,000 tools and apparatuses, more than 400 scientific instruments and clocks, and furthermore, a vast library.[26] The collecting objective of the Kunstkammer was to encompass the wonders of natural objects (Nat-

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uralia) and man-made objects (Artificialia). Its encyclopedic character is an expression of the will to grasp the entire world, embodying the accumulation of universal knowledge through the monarch's collection. In particular, what Augustus collected with passion was a group of sophisticated craft works created through the fusion of nature and human labor. It can be said that in the *Statue of Daphne* (fig. 6), which combines red coral and sculpture, the ideology of the Kunstkammer—the union of nature and technical art—is succinctly demonstrated.

Furthermore, what should be noted is that the Kunstkammer of Dresden Castle was not limited to being a simple storage space but was also a site of production. According to the inventory, there were seven rooms on the third and fourth floors of the west wing of the palace, and the holdings of each room are recorded in detail. The central room was called "the small chamber where my most gracious Elector draws."[27] Equipped with a "writing desk (Schreibtische)" and a "drawing desk (Reißtisch)," a private space was formed there that could be entered and exited via an indoor spiral staircase, avoiding public eye from the ground level. This staircase further led to an attic room on the fourth floor, where a "lathe room" was established for the hobby of ivory carving, and it is recorded that the workshop of the master court turner Egidius Lobenigk (1550–1595) was located nearby.[28] In this way, it is clear that Elector Augustus, who had established a drawing room and a lathe room within the palace, was a dilettante monarch participating in artistic practice. In fact, he received instruction in turning techniques from Lobenigk and produced 135 pieces of ivory sculpture (fig. 7). It is recorded that these were displayed on the tiers of an octagonal table in the Kunstkammer.[29] That is to say, the Kunstkammer simultaneously fulfilled the function of an exhibition room as well as a treasury.

The subsequent Saxon court expanded its collection primarily with artworks, using this Kunstkammer as a foundation. In particular, in the 18th century, Augustus the Strong (1670–1733) learned the art of utilizing paintings, prints, and medals as media for the representation of royal authority from the court culture of the French King Louis XIV, and organized Versailles-style court rituals. Furthermore, confrontation with the Ottoman Empire, despite being a hostile relationship, aroused interest in excellent arms and ornaments, leading to the formation of a world-scale Ottoman collection. The Orientalism that was sweeping Europe at the time drove him to the collection of East Asian ceramics. Furthermore, the spirit of scientific inquiry since Elector Augustus was directed toward the research of porcelain, which was still impossible to produce in Western Europe, and in 1709, the firing of hard-paste porcelain finally succeeded. When the Meissen Porcelain Manufactory was established in 1710, white porcelain was prized as diplomatic gifts and it brought enormous profits by monopolizing the European market. His son Frederick Augustus II (1696–1763), against the backdrop of the wealth inherited from Augustus the Strong, realized large-scale collections of Italian and Dutch paintings, including Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* (1512), and opened the way for the development of the Elector's

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Fig. 6: Abraham and Wenzel Jamnitzer, Statuette of Daphne with Coral Tines, Silver, partially gilt, coral, enamel, late 16th century, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden. Photo credit: Grünes Gewölbe, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden. Foto: Jürgen Karpinski.

Naoki Sato
The Genealogy of Japanese Museums: From the Shōsōin Treasury in Nara to the Östasiatiska Museet in Stockholm
https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/23731



7

collection into a modern art museum through the establishment of a picture gallery.[30] At the same time, the enrichment of the collection of scientific instruments, including British-made reflecting telescopes, expanded interest toward grasping the universe, including fixed stars and planets, rather than just the terrestrial world, further pushing forward the expansion of the worldview.[31]

When comparing the Kunstkammer of the Electors of Saxony with the Shōsōin, the differences in their fundamental character emerge more clearly. First, it can be said that the encyclopedic character of the Kunstkammer was an attempt to reconstruct a microcosm—that is, the entire world—within a room and to grasp it visually. It was not merely a collection, but a visualization of the possibility of symbolic acts to grasp the world order and, by extension, to rule. Entering the 18th century, under the influence of Enlightenment thought, such collections gradually moved toward public opening, and the dissemination of knowledge to the citizen class became an objective. At the same time, it also functioned as a device to boast of royal prestige. The scientific gaze and systematic classification directed toward the collection contributed to the development of academic disciplines in the West and, in particular, became the catalyst for preparing the establishment of natural history museums. Furthermore, art collections, through the ideology of the public opening and preservation of works, would form the institutional foundation of modern art museums. In contrast, the greatest characteristic of the Shōsōin is found rather in its long-term sealing and non-public nature. There, the primary objective was to preserve the cherished items of Emperor Shōmu in their original form and transmit them to future generations. For approximately seven hundred years, from the Middle Ages when political power shifted to the warrior class, through the early modern period, until political authority returned to the Emperor, this treasury escaped pillage and

Fig. 7: Augustus, Elector of Saxony, Artworks, ivory, late 16th century, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden. Photo credit: Grünes Gewölbe, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden. Foto: Dirk Weber.

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/23731



8

was inherited without the Imperial line being severed. Even taking this single point of continuity, the Shōsōin is an extremely rare case in world history. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the fact that it was virtually frozen for twelve hundred years until its unsealing by the Meiji government indicates that the Shōsōin treasures played a decisive role in constructing and maintaining the "sacredness" of the Imperial family.

In 1892, twenty years after the unsealing of the Shōsōin, the "Imperial Property Classification" (Gyobutsu Seiri-gakari) was established at the former Akasaka Detached Palace (now the State Guest House) in Tokyo, and a large-scale project for the reorganization and repair of the treasures spanning over ten years was carried out. In this process, the existence of treasures that no longer retained their original form due to deterioration over time or fading also became clear, and Shōsōin ancient textiles (kire) were classified into four stages, ranging from large fragments for which original judgment was possible to fine dust.[32] In 1914, the "Shōsōin Section" was placed in the Nara Imperial Household Museum, and the full-scale reorganization of ancient textiles began. The ancient textiles were stored in legged Chinese-style chests (Karabitsu), totaling 322 chests, and even the "dust" (jinkai) (fig. 8), which hardly retained any original form, was strictly preserved as an object of investigation.[33] Among this dust, parts of famous treasures or traces of production techniques are sometimes discovered, and it possesses value as precious historical material containing unknown information.[34] It goes without saying that academic significance is recognized in the remains left in large quantities themselves, but at the same time, it cannot be denied that a sense that even the dust was imbued with sacredness was at work in the background of why they were not discarded. Even if they are scraps of cloth, the vivid colors that recall the era of Emperor Shōmu seem to harbor a strong spiritual aura even today. The Shōsōin, which has been protected by sealing, pos-

Fig. 8: Jinkai (Fragments), Chest No. 81, Shōsōin, Nara. Photo credit: Shosoin.

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/23731

sesses a peculiarity comparable to sacred relics in the Christian world in terms of the "maintenance of sacredness." However, as if keeping pace with the era of modernization in which Japan opened its doors and promoted Westernization, the Shōsōin was finally opened. Public opening through the Nara Exhibition became the catalyst for transforming the Imperial treasures into cultural properties that symbolize the legitimacy of the state. In the process in which the system of public museums was being organized, the Shōsōin treasures continued to function as their important core. Despite this, it is difficult to say that sacredness was completely stripped from the Shōsōin treasures. Rather, due to their transcendent beauty and historical depth, even after being reorganized as modern cultural properties, they continue to harbor a unique spiritual brilliance.

Establishment of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, Stockholm, and Japanese Exhibition Ideology

As previously mentioned, Crown Prince Gustaf Adolf of Sweden, accompanied by Princess Louise, arrived at the port of Yokohama on September 2, 1926, aboard the steamship *Siberia Maru*. He stayed at the Kasumigaseki Detached Palace in Tokyo, visited Nikko the following day, and after passing through Nagoya (fig. 9), entered Kyoto on September 20, staying at the Nara Hotel from the 24th to the 27th. During this period, it is said that he energetically inspected temples, shrines, ruins, and museums, and stayed overnight at the Shōjōshin-in on Mount Koya. He then continued his journey to Osaka, Beppu, and Nagasaki, before traveling to Busan and Gyeongju on the Korean Peninsula.[35] The Crown Prince, who was also known as an expert in archaeology and botany, had a profound knowledge of Eastern culture, and his greatest wish during his stay in Japan was to see and study the Shōsōin treasures in Nara firsthand. When the Shōsōin was unsealed through special measures by the Meiji government, the Crown Prince visited twice a day—morning and afternoon—during his three-day stay in Nara, patiently investigating almost all the treasures, showing particularly strong interest in the three-colored ceramics (Sansai).[36] As a commemorative gift for his visit, Emperor Taishō presented the Crown Prince with a ceramic vase with a "melon design" by Kiyomizu Rokubei V, and the Empress presented the Princess with an embroidered folding screen with a "chrysanthemum design."[37] After returning home, the Crown Prince opened these two works and other Japanese artworks to the public at the National Museum in Stockholm from June 3 to September 11, 1927, and records remain stating that after the exhibition ended, the works were returned to the Crown Prince and Princess.[38] The state of the exhibition was introduced with photographs in a weekly newspaper at the time and attracted the interest of many citizens (fig. 10).[39] There is a lack of direct materials to know exactly what Gustaf Adolf learned at the Shōsōin or what ideological influence he received. However, the fact that he opened the Japanese art to the public immediately after returning home can be interpreted as a clear expression of his will to share his artistic experience during

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/23731



9

Fig. 9: The Crown Prince and Princess visit a porcelain factory in Nagoya. Photo, 1926. Photo credit: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, Stockholm, Sweden.

his trip to Japan with the citizens.

Thereafter, in 1931, an Exhibition of Japanese Art sponsored by the Japan-Sweden Society (*Svensk-japanska Sällskapet*) was held at the Artists' House (*Konstnärshuset*) in Stockholm. The venue displayed collections of ancient art such as old paintings, Buddhist statues, ukiyo-e, and netsuke that were held within Sweden.[40] Regarding this exhibition, Volume 2 of the Japanese journal *Bijutsu Kenkyū* (Journal of Art Studies, 1932) reported as follows: "During the session, we looked up to the visit of the Swedish Emperor and the Crown Prince… The exhibition was held with the purpose of introducing Japanese art, and the exhibits were selected from the Swedish Royal collection, the National Museum of Sweden collection, and Swedish private collections, totaling 712 items. The selection, display, and catalog commentary were mainly handled by Professor Elisseeff of the Musée Guimet in Paris."[41] From this, it can also be inferred that the collecting activities triggered by the Crown Prince's visit to the Far East formed the core of the exhibits. Around the same time, in 1929, the "Exhibition of Japanese Art in Paris" was held to introduce modern Japanese painting, which subsequently toured to the Netherlands and was well-received. In 1930, "*Esposizione d'Arte Giapponese*" (Exhibition of Japanese Art*)* was held in Rome, funded by Baron Okura Kishichiro (1882-1963). It centered on Nihonga painters belonging to the Japan Art Institute. All of these exhibitions primarily aimed to introduce modern Japanese painting (*Nihonga*) to European collectors who had previously been interested in Edo-period painting.[42] In contrast, the exhibition in Stockholm centered on ancient art and did not include a single modern Japanese painting. In this respect, it clearly stands apart from the trends in Paris and Rome during the same period. Furthermore,

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/23731



FRÅN KRONPRINSPARETS BESÖK PÅ GOTLAND.
(Se även närmast föregående nummer.)

KRONPRINSPARET OCH *i bakgrunden* ÄNKEMARKISINNAN MILFORD HAVEN *utanför Vänge kyrka.*
Foto. HELLGREN, Visby.
Kliché: Sjöberg, Gbg.

Kronprinsparets Gotlandsbesök avslutades den 31 maj efter ännu några innehållsrika dagar med utflykter till olika delar av den på forntida byggnader och minnesmärken rika ön. Efter besök i södra och mellersta Gotland ställdes den 30 maj kosan åt öster, där bl. a. Dalhems kyrka — en av öns vackraste och ståtligaste lantkyrkor — med stort intresse studerades. Vidare bestegs det märkliga befästa kalkberget Torsborgen, den mäktigaste av Gotlands fornborgar, varefter färden gick vidare till Gammelgarn och Gålrum, där ett nytt gravfynd i en rauk demonstrerades, samt därpå över ett flertal platser tillbaka till Visby. Sista dagen ställdes kosan norrut mot kyrkan och gravfälten i Sten-

KRONPRINSEN OCH PROFESSOR ROOSVAL *bese vid Hemse Folkhögskola den i Fardhem just under besöket funna guldbrakteten, ett av de praktfullaste fynd som någonsin gjorts i landet. Se bilden å nästa sida.*
Foto. HELLGREN, Visby.

GÅVOR TILL KRONPRINSPARET UNDER RESAN I JAPAN. *utställda för allmänheten å Nationalmuseum.*
Fr. v. BRODERAD SKÄRM från Kyoto. Gåva till KRONPRINSESSAN av KEJSARINNAN AV JAPAN. Ett utomordentligt handarbete. VAS AV ROKUBEI V. Gåva till KRONPRINSEN av KEJSAREN AV JAPAN. Rokubei var medlem av en gammal berömd krukmakare-dynasti. I glasmontern KERAMISKT GODS, skålar, vaser, teburkar m. m. — Foto. MALMSTRÖM, Sthlm. — Kliché: Sjöberg, Gbg.

— 582 —

10

looking back, it is worth noting that in the "Exhibition of Great Japanese Art" held in Stockholm in 1911, as many as 1,968 works were displayed, many of which were exhibited again in the 1931 exhibition.[43] The 1911 exhibition was dedicated to Gustaf Adolf, who was the Crown Prince at the time, and it is not difficult to imagine that the Crown Prince's interest in ancient art was strongly reflected in the composition of the 1931 exhibition.

Crown Prince Gustaf Adolf was deeply involved in the establishment of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities (*Östasiatiska Museet*) in

Fig. 10:
Gifts to the crown prince couple during their trip to Japan. On display to the public at the National Museum, photo, *Hvar 8 dag*, 1927, nr 24, s. 582, National Library of Sweden.

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Stockholm. In 1921, when the China Committee (*Kinakommittén*) was established as a research institution, the Crown Prince became one of its founding members, serving as chairman and providing funds while leading the collection of archaeological materials. These collections were opened to the public in 1929 and became the foundation for the subsequent Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities.[44] Following the death of Nils Palmgren (1890–1955), who had served as an advisor to the Crown Prince since 1933, Bo Gyllensvärd (1916–2004) took over the position. At the time, Gyllensvärd was the director of the Eastern Department of the Nationalmuseum, but he proposed a plan to integrate the Oriental art collections and related materials, which were dispersed between the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities and the Nationalmuseum, into a single building. This plan was realized in 1959 with the consent of Gustaf VI Adolf, who had already become King, and the King informed Gyllensvärd of his intention to eventually donate his entire collection to the museum.[45] The new building, renovated from the stables of the Royal Horse Guard built around 1700, opened on May 16, 1963. Gyllensvärd was appointed as the first director.

In drafting the exhibition plan, Gyllensvärd visited the Yamato Bunkakan in Nara, which had opened on October 31, 1960. This fact is conveyed through the memoirs of the art historian Yashiro Yukio (1890–1975), who was the first director of the Yamato Bunkakan. Yashiro writes as follows:

"It was around the spring of 1961 when a famous Italian countess, Marina Luling Buschetti, visited the Yamato Bunkakan..... After returning home, the countess sent a letter to the Yamato Bunkakan. According to it, she had received an invitation to a birthday celebration from the King of Sweden, so she went to Stockholm. After the King's banquet was over, the guests were encouraged by the King, who said, 'I love Oriental art and am currently having a museum built for my own collection. It is not yet complete, but please everyone, take a look at the museum in progress,' and the guests were guided to that museum. When she was taken there, she—that is, the countess—was surprised. The reason was that since she had just seen the Yamato Bunkakan in Nara the other day, this new museum in Stockholm remarkably reminded her of the Yamato Bunkakan. Thinking this was strange, she asked the young director of the museum, 'How did this come to be?' and the answer was, 'It is just as you observed. ***I was invited to the opening ceremony of the Yamato Bunkakan in Nara and made a special effort to attend. By order of the King, I traveled around the world's museums to study things that could serve as a reference for***

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/23731

> ***building a museum for the King's collection, and so I even attended the opening ceremony of the new museum in Nara.'*** *Recalling this upon seeing the Italian countess's letter, I remembered that there was a young man named Bo Gyllensvärd who had made a special effort to attend the opening ceremony of the Yamato Bunkakan from Stockholm, and he had told me that he had come by order of the King of Sweden."*[46]

Yashiro was unable to attend the opening ceremony of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, and King Gustaf VI Adolf never visited the Yamato Bunkakan.[47] However, the connection between the two dates back even further. In 1935, at "The International Exhibition of Chinese Art" held at Burlington House and sponsored by the Royal Academy, Yashiro and Crown Prince Gustaf Adolf stood in the same venue and were captured in the same photograph (fig. 11).[48] Although Yashiro does not mention this encounter in his *Memoirs*, and it is impossible to confirm today whether the Crown Prince spoke to Yashiro about his impressions of his stay in Japan or his vision for a new museum, it is clear they shared a connection.

So, what did Gyllensvärd learn from the Yamato Bunkakan, and what was the "affinity" felt by Countess Buschetti? Providing a clear answer to this question is not easy. As Giada Ricci aptly points out, the ideology of Japanese museum exhibition space is deeply related to pre-modern traditions—specifically, the aesthetic of *tokonoma* (alcove) and shelf decoration in *shoin*-style architecture shown in manuals for 16th-century tea masters such as *Kundaikan-souchouki* and *O-ka-*

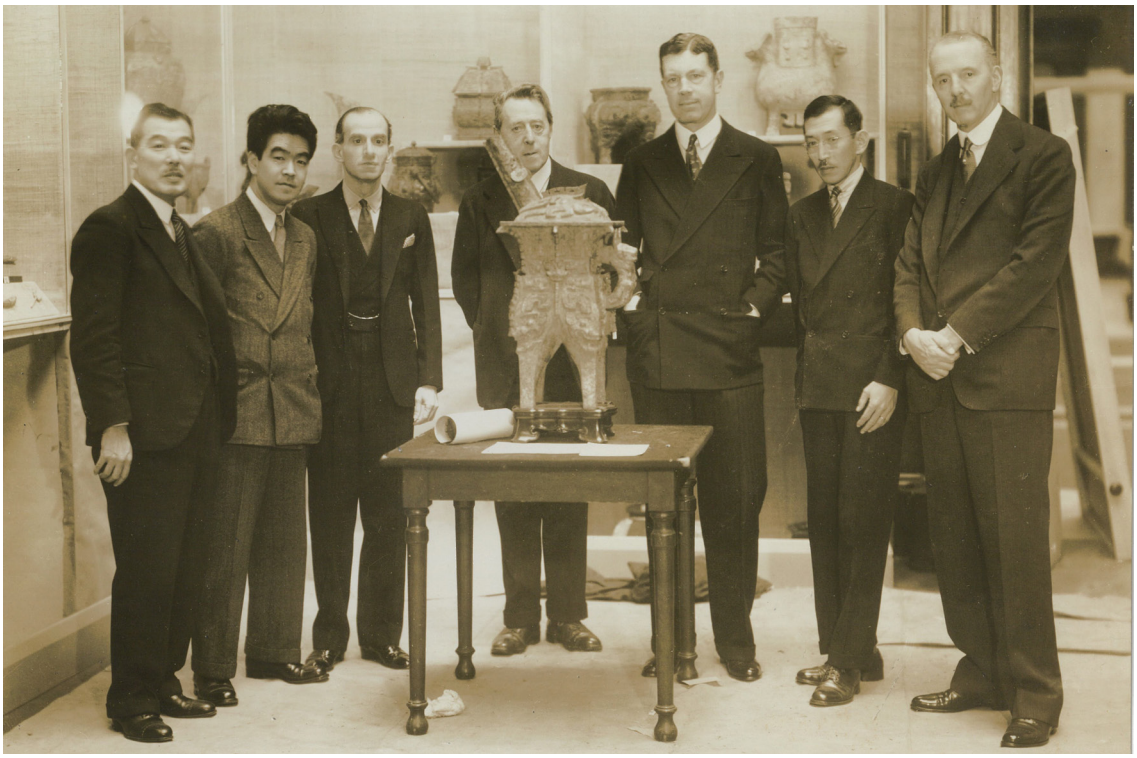
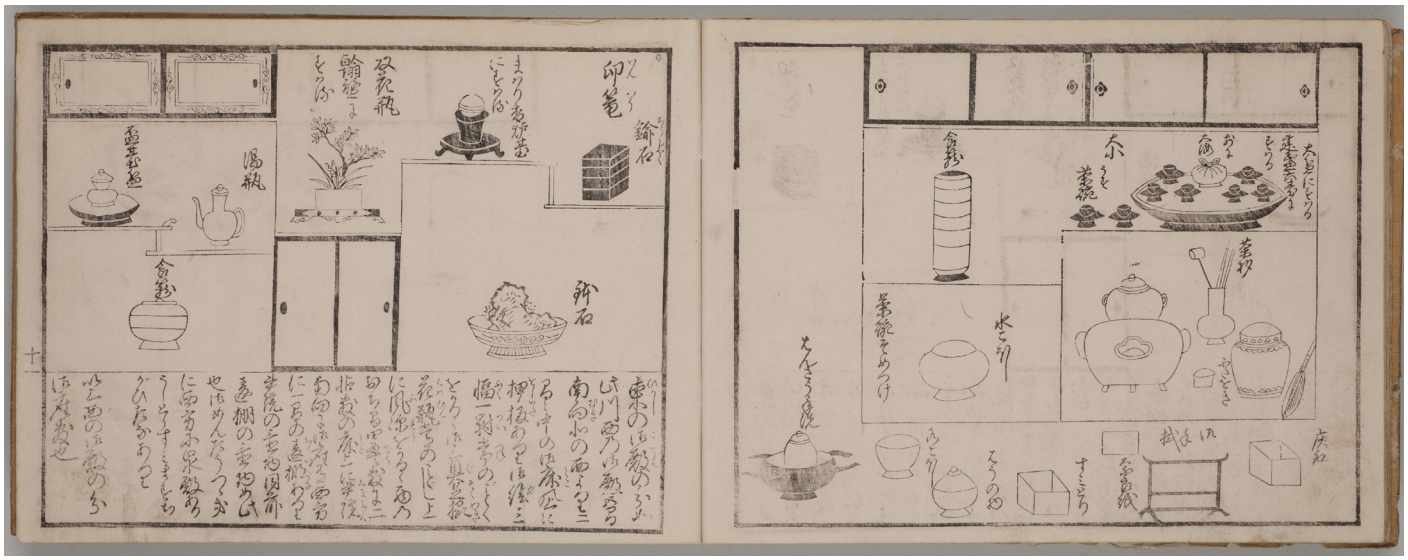


Fig. 11:
Second from left, Yashiro Yukio, and third from right, Crown Prince Gustaf Adolf of Sweden. Opening of the International Exhibition of Chinese Art, London. Photo, 1935. Photo credit: Yashiro family.

Naoki Sato
The Genealogy of Japanese Museums: From the Shōsōin Treasury in Nara to the Östasiatiska Museet in Stockholm
https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/23731



12

zari-sho (fig. 12).[49] Nevertheless, if one considers the fact that Gustaf Adolf had seen the exhibitions at the Nara Imperial Household Museum and the Shōsōin firsthand, it is not difficult to imagine that he might no longer have felt fully satisfied with the European court tradition—seen at the time in the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm—of arranging ceramics as wall decorations (fig. 13). It is natural to consider that the King's intention in ordering Gyllensvärd to investigate museums worldwide was to learn the aesthetics of Japanese exhibition spaces. From the exhibition photographs at the time of the opening of Östasiatiska Museet (the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities) (fig. 14), one can clearly read the reflection of Japanese spatial concepts. There, just as in the exhibitions at the Yamato Bunkakan, a sufficient "ma" (interval/space) is secured between works. This "ma" is none other than an aesthetic principle that creates a distance and tension where craft works shine most beautifully, based on the subtle arrangement of utensils nurtured in the tradition of *chanoyu* (tea ceremony). That quietly restrained spatial composition must have left a strong impression not only on Countess Buschetti but on many visitors. Furthermore, looking at the morphological similarity of the exhibition cases (fig. 15), one cannot help but recall a direct suggestion from the Yamato Bunkakan. Here, one can see one of the turning points in the exhibition of Oriental art in the West. That is, by actively introducing traditional Japanese aesthetics, a transition was realized to an exhibition ideology that liberated Oriental art from "exotic decoration" and allowed it to be experienced subjectively within a serene viewing space.

In this sense, the sealing and maintenance of sacredness in the Shōsōin, the reorganization of Japanese exhibition space in the Yamato Bunkakan, and its reception and transformation in the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities in Stockholm can be called important examples demonstrating the intersection of Eastern and Western views on treasures and exhibition ideologies. The comparison attempted in this paper is intended to provide a starting point for reconsidering

Fig. 12: *Sōami, O-kazari-sho*, c. 1523, published 1660. Photo credit: Tokyo University of the Arts Library.

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/23731



13

Fig. 13:
Exhibition gallery of Chinese ceramics at the National Museum, Stockholm, early 20th century.
Photo credit: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, Stockholm, Sweden.



14

Fig. 14:
Sculpture hall at the Östasiatiska Museet. Photo, 1965.
Photo credit: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, Stockholm, Sweden.

Fig. 15:
The exhibition gallery at the time of the opening of the Yamato Bunkakan. Photo, 1961.
Photo credit: The Museum Yamato Bunkakan.

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/23731



15

global art history, not only from the perspective of the institutional transition from treasuries to museums but also from the perspective of the circulation of spirituality and aesthetics that dwell within exhibition spaces.

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Endnotes:

1 Wada 2022, pp. 12-15.

2 Tokyo National Museum official website: https://www.tnm.jp/modules/r_free_page/index.php?id=144.

3 Sugimoto 1967, pp. 4-5.

4 Sugimoto 1967, p. 33.

5 Sugimoto 1967, pp. 8-9.

6 For details on representative treasure techniques and materials, see: Nishikawa 2019.

7 Fujiwara no Sanesuke, *Shōyūki* (Diary of Fujiwara no Sanesuke), (61 volumes, covering the years 977–1040); *Hyakuren shō* (A collection of excerpts from court nobles' diaries) (author unknown, 13th century), etc. Quoted from: Yoneda 1998, p. 155.

8 Yoneda 1998, p. 162.

9 Yoneda 1998, pp. 161–163.

10 *Meiji Tennō Ki 1970*, pp. 53–54. Furthermore, on page 54, it is recorded that "Emperor Meiji first viewed the Nara Exhibition at the Tōdaiji Cloister and then unsealed the Shōsōin," but due to the Seinan Rebellion at the time of the Shōsōin visit, the Nara Exhibition of that year was not held. However, it is highly likely that he saw items arranged in the Tōdaiji Cloister in advance for exhibition preparations, and it is thought that the compilers later misidentified this as the "Nara Exhibition."

11 Yoneda 1998, pp. 175-176.

12 *Nara Hakurankai Zen-shi* (Pre-history of the Nara Exhibition), Nara Prefectural Library and Information Center, 2018. Published at the following URL: https://www.library.pref.nara.jp/sites/default/files/narahaku2018.pdf (2026.02.01). The "Buppin Mokuroku" (Item Catalog) is from the following: https://meta01.library.pref.nara.jp/opac/repository/repo/153598/ (2026.02.01).

13 Sugimoto 1967, p. 193.

14 In 1877, there was a visit to the Shōsōin from abroad that was important in art history. Designer Christopher Dresser, who arrived in Japan to deliver European craft products collected by the South Kensington Museum in London for donation to the Meiji government, visited the Shōsōin on February 3 under the guidance of Machida Hisanari and described his impressions regarding the imperial treasures in detail in the following book: Dresser, 1882, pp. 89 f.

15 Wada 1996, pp. 144–145.

16 Prince Albert Victor and Prince George of Wales 1886, pp. 110-111.

17 Wada 1996, p. 148.

18 Wada 1996, p. 148.

19 Yoneda 1998, pp. 183-184.

20 Nishiyama 2012, pp. 23-24.

21 Nishiyama 2012, p. 35.

22 In this paper, following Pomian, I use "Kunstkammer" in the sense of a treasury rather than "Wunderkammer." Although these two terms arose almost simultaneously in the latter half of the 16th century, strictly speaking, "Wunderkammer" was reported about 10 years later, in 1550, for the first time in connection with the collection of the Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand I. In 1565, the Munich physician and librarian Samuel van Quiccheberg used both terms, distinguishing the Kunstkammer as "a room of man-made objects (*artificiosarum rerum conclave*)" and the Wunderkammer as "a room of miraculous things (*miraculosarum rerum promptuarium*)." By 1594, in the will of Ferdinand II

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/23731

regarding the collection at Ambras Castle, these two terms were integrated as *Kunst- und Wunderkammer*. Currently, both terms are accepted in German without distinction. Scheicher 1996, pp. 520-552.

23 Pomian 2020, pp. 392-463.

24 Pomian 2022, pp. 315-320.

25 Minning 2010, No page number.

26 Syndram 2017, S. 197-198.

27 Recorded in the "Inventory" as "*In Meines gnedigsten Churfürsten und hern Reiß Cammer und kleinem Gemach*." Minning 2010; Watanabe-O'Kelly 2002, p. 75.

28 Minning 2010, No page number.

29 Maurice 1985, S. 56.

30 Bischoff 2005, pp. 26-27.

31 Bischoff 2005, p. 26.

32 Obi 2012, p. 41.

33 Obi 2012, p. 41.

34 Obi 2012, p. 41.

35 *Itinerary of Their Royal Highnesses The Crown Prince & Princess of Sweden, September-October, 1926*. This itinerary was changed several times and is bound into the following historical material. Note that there are also Japanese records by the Imperial Household Ministry regarding the changed itinerary. *Gaihin settai-roku: Sweden-koku Kōtaishi dō hi denka raikō no bu* (Records of Reception for Foreign Guests: Section on the Visit of the Crown Prince and Princess of Sweden), 1 vol., Shikibu-shoku (Board of Ceremonies), Taisho 15 (1926), Imperial Household Archives.

36 Almgren 1932, pp. 10-11.

37 Document record dated September 15, 1926, from the Minister of the Imperial Household to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Extremely unusually, black-and-white photographs of both works are attached to this document. *Gaikō zōto-roku* (Records of Diplomatic Gifts and Responses), Shikibu-shoku (Board of Ceremonies), Taisho 15 (1926), Imperial Household Archives.

38 *Meddelanden från Nationalmuseum*, vol. VIII, 1927-1930, Stockholm, 1928, p. 37, p. 58; *Nämndprotokoll*, June 7, 1927, and October 10, 1927, Nationalmuseum's archive.

39 *HVAR 8 DAG*, 1927-6-12, n: 37, p. 582.

40 Elisseeff 1931.

41 En-enshi 1932, pp. 30-31.

42 Nagata 2008, pp. 20-25.

43 Wettergren 1911.

44 Okuda 1990, p. 52.

45 Okuda 1990, p. 52.

46 Emphasis added by the autor. Yashiro 1972, pp. 437-438.

47 Yashiro 1972., p. 439.

48 Taki 2025, p. 10.

49 Ricci 2023, pp. 171-173.

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Gaihin settai-roku. Sweden-koku Kōtaishi dō hi denka raikō no bu (Records of Reception for Foreign Guests: Section on the Visit of the Crown Prince and Princess of Sweden), Official Government Documents, 1 vol., Shikibu-shoku (Board of Ceremonies), Imperial Household Archives, 1926 (Taisho 15).

Gaikō zōto-roku (Records of Diplomatic Gifts and Responses), Shikibu-shoku (Board of Ceremonies), Official Government Documents, Imperial Household Archives, 1926 (Taisho 15).

Hvar 8 dag, June 12, 1927, No. 37, Stockholm, Kungliga biblioteket.

Meddelanden från Nationalmuseum, vol. VIII, 1927-1930, Stockholm, 1928.

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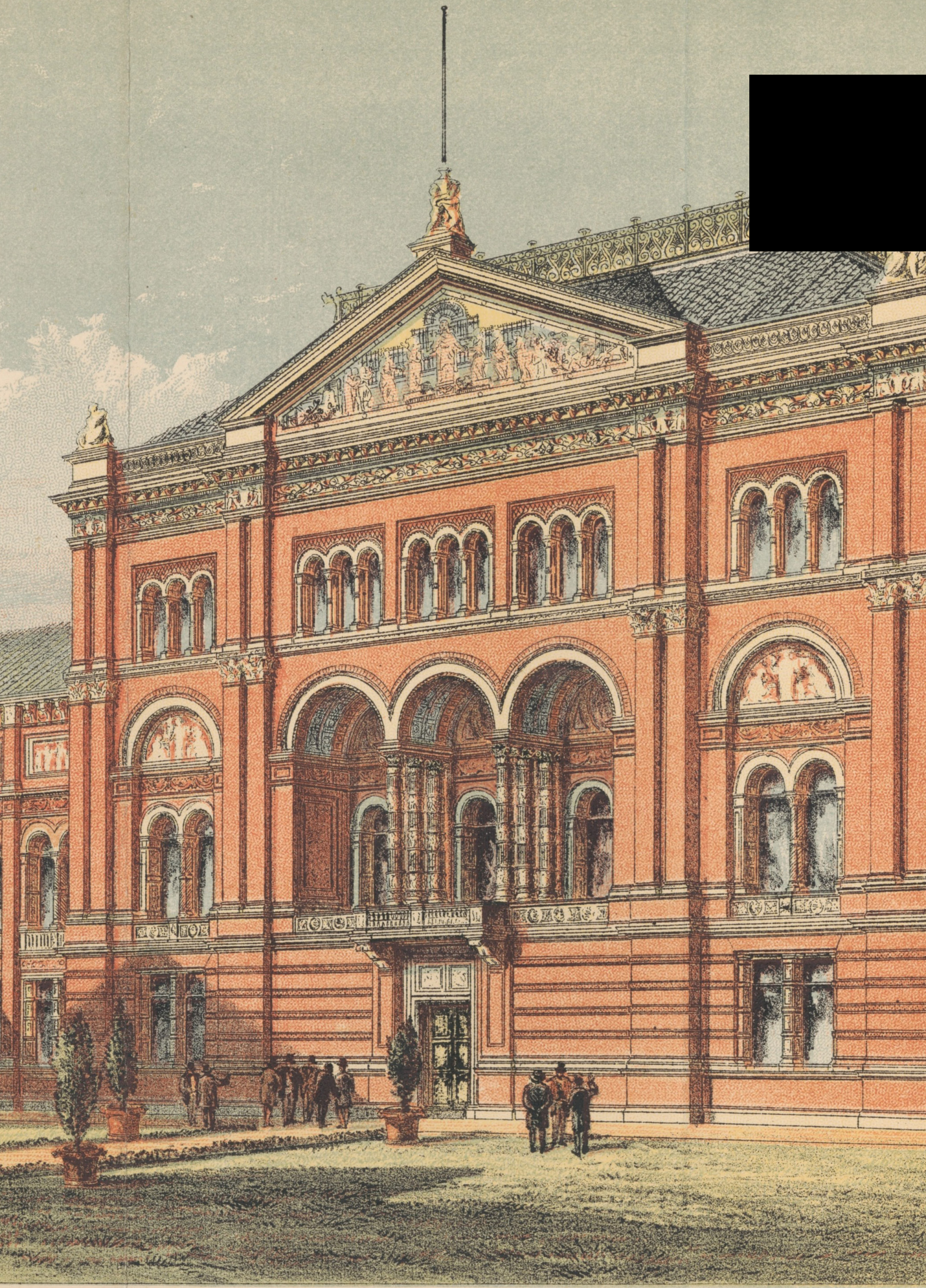
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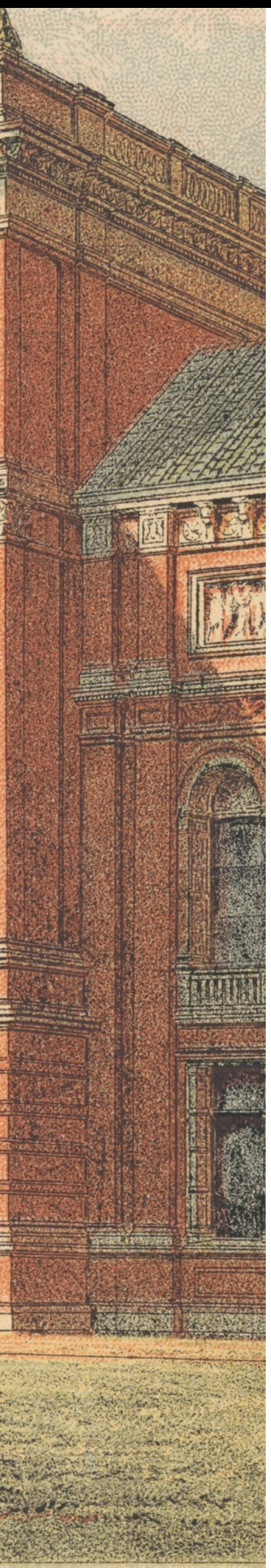
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Establishment of a Museum in Modern Japan: From the Perspective of the Influence of the South Kensington Museum

Hitomi Inoue

Keywords:
South Kensington Museum; Museum of Fine Arts; Boston; Imperial Museum in Japan; Ernest Fenollosa; Okakura Kakuzō



ABSTRACT:

The tripartite art policy of expositions, museums, and art schools, originating with the London Great Exhibition of 1851 and beginning in South Kensington, spread rapidly across Europe and America. It reached Japan, which was promoting industrial development, following its participation in the Vienna World's Fair in 1873. Japanese bureaucrats and foreign advisors played pivotal roles in establishing art policies and museums. Following Machida Hisanari and Sano Tsunetami, who were involved in art administration in the early Meiji period, Ernest Fenollosa and Okakura Kakuzō were the central figures who advanced art administration in the mid-Meiji period. Ultimately their goal was the establishment of the Art Bureau. From the proposal for the Shukokan museum's construction in 1871 to the establishment of the Imperial Museum in 1889, South Kensington's art policy provided indispensable inspiration throughout the formation of Meiji Japan's museums.

La politica artistica tripartita basata su esposizioni, musei e scuole d'arte, nata con la Grande Esposizione di Londra del 1851 e iniziata a South Kensington, si diffuse rapidamente in Europa e in America. Raggiunse il Giappone, che stava promuovendo lo sviluppo industriale, dopo la sua partecipazione all'Esposizione Universale di Vienna. I burocrati giapponesi e i consulenti stranieri hanno svolto un ruolo fondamentale nella definizione delle politiche artistiche e nella creazione dei musei. Dopo Machida Hisanari e Sano Tsunetami, che furono coinvolti nell'amministrazione artistica all'inizio del periodo Meiji, Ernest Fenollosa e Okakura Kakuzō furono le figure centrali che promossero l'amministrazione artistica nella metà del periodo Meiji. Il loro obiettivo finale era la creazione dell'Ufficio dell'Arte. Dalla proposta di costruzione dello museo Shukokan nel 1871 alla creazione del Museo Imperiale nel 1889, la politica artistica di South Kensington fornì un'ispirazione indispensabile durante tutta la formazione dei musei del Giappone Meiji.

Opening Picture:

Fig. 1: The court of the South Kensington Museum. engraving, ca. 1890.

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In 1868, the Edo Shogunate (1603-1867), a feudal government that had lasted for 264 years, collapsed, and the new Meiji government was established. The Meiji period (1868-1912) represented a major turning point in Japan's transition from a feudal system to a modern nation. The new Meiji government aimed to establish a centralized state, actively adopting Western systems and technologies. Guided by the slogans of industrial promotion, national enrichment, and military strength, the Meiji government rapidly modernized.

As a national framework for art and education policy, Japan modeled its system on the art institutions established at South Kensington in Britain. This cutting-edge art system, integrating the three elements of exposition, museum, and art school, aligned with the Meiji government's modernization goals and was closely connected with industrial promotion.

This paper first examines the founding principles of the South Kensington Museum and its affiliated art school, established following the world exposition. It then discusses the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFA, Boston), and its affiliated art school, modeled after this system. Finally, the paper examines the influence of South Kensington system on the establishment of Japanese museums and art schools, clarifying the vision of the museum that modern Japan envisioned.

Through what stages was South Kensington system adopted in Japan? Were there any distinctive Japanese developments within this process? This paper focuses particularly on the roles of Japanese bureaucrats Machida Hisanari (1838-1897),[1] Sano Tsunetami (1823-1902)[2] and Okakura Kakuzō (Tenshin, 1863-1913), [3] as well as a foreign advisor Ernest Francisco Fenollosa (1853-1908),[4] in establishing art policies and museums during Japan's modernization in the Meiji period.

South Kensington System—Expositions, Museums, and Art Schools

The model for Japan's museum concept in the early Meiji period was the South Kensington art-institutional system in Britain, then regarded as the forefront of Europe. This system refers to the nineteenth-century British framework for art and design education, developed under Sir Henry Cole (1808-1882), a civil servant and cultural reformer, and aimed at integrating industrial improvement, public education, and museum resources into a unified national strategy.[5]

International competition driven by nineteenth-century industrialization accelerated the rise of modern nationalism, with world expositions emerging as symbols of national prestige and art education being positioned as a key instrument for shaping national identity. In Britain, as Quinn observes, utilitarianism played a crucial role by rejecting cultural elitism and pursuing the greatest happiness for the greatest number, thereby promoting the democratization of "taste."[6] This ideological foundation led to the establishment of the South Kensington system, which integrated industrial development with cultural policy.

Henry Cole, who successfully organized the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations (the

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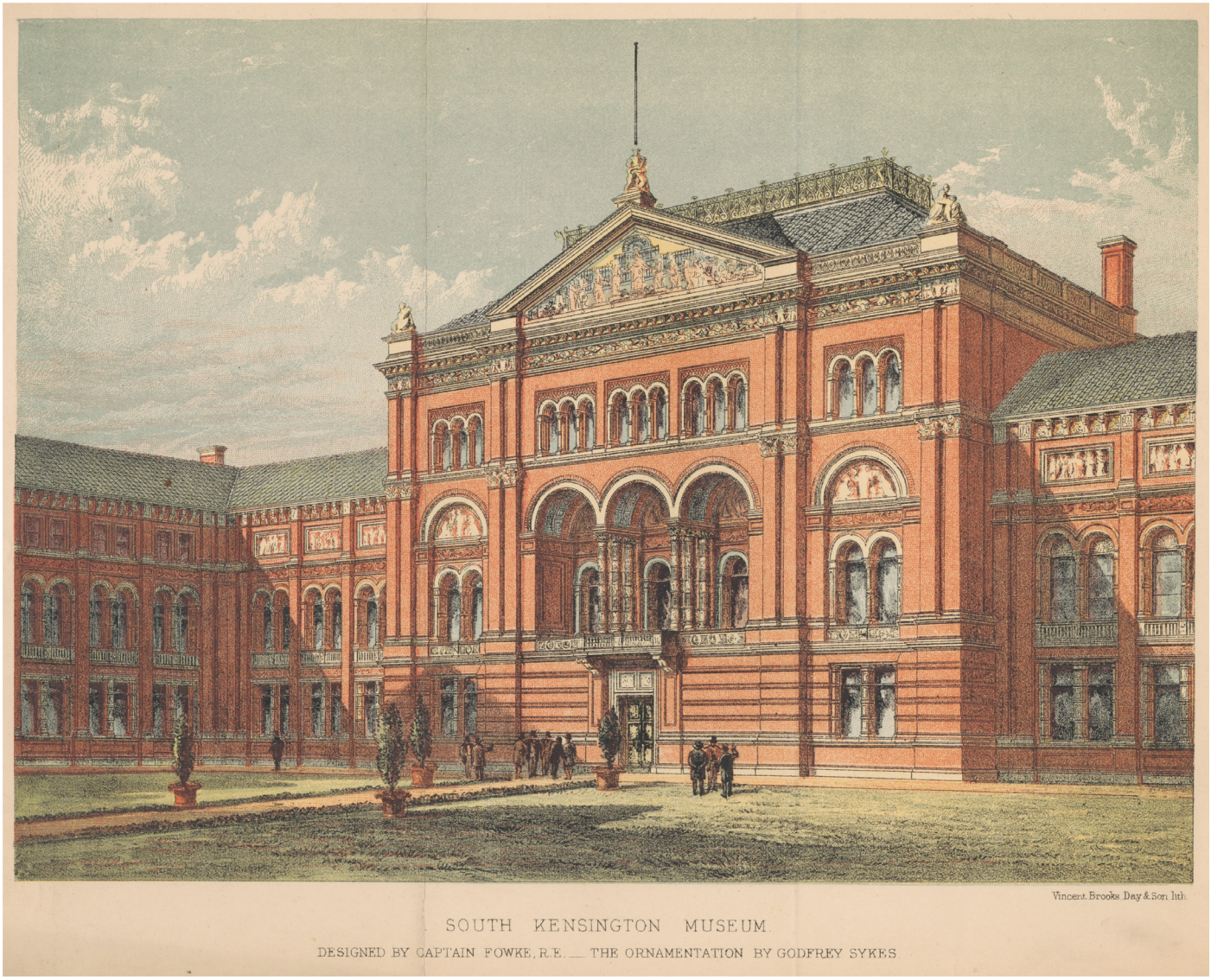
Great Exhibition) in 1851, spearheaded the establishment of the museum and art school and held key positions in the Department of Practical Art (later, of Science and Art), Board of Trade. From 1857 onward, he concurrently served as director of both the department and the museum, and South Kensington became the central hub of art administration encompassing museums, art schools, and administrative bodies.

The Museum of Manufacture, established in 1856, sought to promote industrial advancement and to foster art and design education in the year following the Great Exhibition. The museum relocated in 1857, becoming the South Kensington Museum (fig.1), and was later renamed the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1899. Its founding principles were to educate designers, manufacturers, and the general public through the public display of artworks, thereby improving industrial design, and to serve the nation as an educational institution.[7] Cole, its first director, aimed to create a public museum for education. The collection was systematically classified by material and technique—glass, metal, wood, ceramics, textiles—and an educational display method was adopted where design and technology were learned through the exhibition of arts and crafts.

Meanwhile, the art school affiliated with the South Kensington Museum traces its roots to the Government School of Design, established in 1837. After relocating with the museum to South Kensington, it was renamed the Normal Training School of Art, which subsequently became commonly known as the South Kensington Art School from 1896. At its inception, the curriculum of the South Kensington Art School prioritized the acquisition of skills and knowledge directly applicable to manufacturing processes, thereby distinguishing itself from the traditional academic art education that had previously prevailed.[8] Reflecting the broader nineteenth-century tension between fine art and applied art, Britain maintained a two-tier art system of art institutions: the Royal Academy occupied a superior position to Cole and his advocates of practical art. Yet, proponents of the South Kensington approach, which rejected artistic elitism and sought to promote public "taste," regarded their program as the "true" modern, scientific, and up-to-date approach to art.[9]

Cole established a nationwide system of art education from elementary schools to normal schools and formulated a national curriculum based on a 23-stage program. Educators involved in promoting industrial design under Cole, who led the Bureau of Applied Arts, began reforming design education to emphasize form and color. Among the key designers involved, one designer particularly noteworthy in relation to Japan is Christopher Dresser (1834-1904), who taught at the National School of Design.[10] Dresser visited Japan in 1876 carrying gifts from the South Kensington Museum to the Japanese government. Accompanied by figures such as Sano Tsunetami and Machida Hisanari, he toured the *Shōsō-in* Treasures and various architectural sites, reportedly being deeply impressed, which resulted in designs that were truly radical.[11]

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The South Kensington Museum and its affiliated art school, centered on applied arts for industrial design, achieved significant success. This influence soon led to the establishment of numerous applied arts museums and affiliated art schools across Europe. Beginning with the Austrian Imperial Museum of Art and Industry *(k. k. Österreichischen Museums für Kunst und Industrie)* and its affiliated School of Arts and Crafts *(k. k. Kunstgewerbeschule)* in 1867, museums and art schools for applied arts were successively established in Berlin, Hamburg, Cologne, and elsewhere. This influence extended even to France, vying for supremacy, and to the early American art museums.

Reviewing this expansion across Europe and the Unites States makes it clear why Meiji-period Japan, when formulating its art system following the Vienna World's Fair, looked to Britain. It was not merely a leader of the Industrial Revolution; under Cole's leadership, it integrated expositions, museums, and art schools to promote industrial improvement—an approach that many nations subsequently adopted.

Fig. 1:
The court of the South Kensington Museum. engraving, ca. 1890.

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2

Fig. 2: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston in Copley Square. ca. 1876-1883. © Boston Public Library.

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and the Massachusetts Normal Art School

Before clarifying the connection between the South Kensington Museum and modern Japanese museums, it is necessary to mention the establishment of the MFA, Boston in the United States (fig. 2).[12] This is because, in early Meiji-period Japan, information on South Kensington's art model was obtained directly from Britain; and, as the subsequent stage in the assimilation of that framework, during the mid-Meiji period, certain systems were also adopted via the United States.

After the Civil War, growing interest in education and culture among Boston citizens led to a movement for an art museum, resulting in the Massachusetts legislature's approval of the Museum of Fine Arts in 1870.[13] Charles C. Perkins (1823-1886), a trustee and the first director of the MFA, Boston, obtained information from the South Kensington Museum to establish the museum's mission. At the outset of the article *North American Review*, Perkins asserted that the formation of museums devoted to industrial art would enable the diffusion of "taste"—once the exclusive privilege of the "great and wealthy"—among the masses, thereby cultivating "public taste". He further emphasized the significance of art education as a means of advancing the general level of intellectual and cultural attainment.[14] He praised the South Kensington Museum and its affili-

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ated art school, stating that "despite being established in Britain for only nineteen years, they have achieved remarkable success," lauding their contribution to industry.[15] The original MFA, Boston emblem, featuring "Art, Education, and Industry," symbolizes this mission by highlighting the crucial role of each element. As Perkins notes, American museums envisioned an ideal grounded in art education for public as a basis for cultural progress, while building collections to enhance national prestige[16]. In this context, the MFA, Boston, while inheriting the principles of South Kensington, emphasized the improvement of "taste" for national development rather than the democratization of "taste" for the general public.

Six years after its founding, in 1876, the MFA, Boston opened to the public. Regarding the relationship between the museum's founding and expositions, the MFA, Boston sent curators to the Centennial International Exposition in Philadelphia. There, they purchased Chinese and Japanese cloisonné enamelware and ceramics, along with Japanese raw silk samples, bronze ware, leather crafts, embossed paper, and lacquerware.[17] Perkins highly valued these acquisitions, anticipating their potential application to modern industrial arts.[18]

The year after opening, an affiliated art school opened within the museum. However, its curriculum followed the Western art academy model, differing from the South Kensington method. That is, while the MFA, Boston itself was established inheriting the South Kensington Museum's industrial promotion mission, its affiliated art school was one teaching drawing and painting within the tradition of the art academy. Thus in what ways was the South Kensington method of art education—focused on industrial arts and teacher training—introduced to the United States?

Perkins envisioned creating a grand academic complex in Boston. This was a massive national academic city plan that included not only the MFA, Boston, but also a technical institute, schools of architecture and medical science, a natural history museum, a geological museum, and an art school.[19] This vision may be regarded as an extension of the South Kensington model. Walter Smith (1836-1886) became a key intellectual force driving this grand project. After working under Henry Cole at the Board of Science and Art in South Kensington, Smith moved to the United States, and there, as a professor at the Massachusetts Normal Art School, he promoted early American art education.[20]

Smith's 1872 publication, *Art Education, Scholastic and Industrial*, introduced a wide range of British art education theory and practice. It covered art education in public schools, industrial art education in France, Germany, and Britain, the management and operation of art schools, and even design and color theory.[21] Smith introduced the South Kensington method of art education to the United States, which bore a strong resemblance to the teacher training programs developed under Henry Cole, predating the 1880s when aestheticism gained prominence in Britain.

Under Smith's direction, the Normal Art School achieved early success, winning a gold medal at the Charita-

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ble Mechanics' Association exhibition in 1874 and score a triumph at the Philadelphia Exposition in 1876.[22] Although the MFA, Boston, and the Exposition, as well as the Normal Art School and the Exposition, were each connected in certain respects, an integrated system linking exposition, museum, and art education—such as that embodied in the South Kensington—had not yet been fully realized. This can be attributed to the fact that, while the MFA, Boston, was a privately founded institution established by the city's social elite, the Normal Art School was a state-run educational institution; despite their shared roots in South Kensington ideals, the two did not operate within a common institutional framework.



3



4

Fig. 3: MACHIDA Hisanari (1838-1897).

Fig. 4: SANO Tsunetami (1823-1902).

Art Policy and Museum Establishment in the Early Meiji Period (1870s)

Japan, before the advent of modernity, lacked Western-style art system; art education was primarily conducted through hereditary schools of established lineages, such as the Kanō school, and private academies. Art was regarded as a form of craftsmanship and was closely intertwined with practical crafts and architectural ornamentation. However, with the Meiji Restoration, Japan embarked on modernization, actively adopting Western systems. Under the slogan of encouragement of new industry, museums also began incorporating Western art administration. Among these, the South Kensington system gained attention as a model for museums that could contribute to industrial promotion.[23]

The catalyst for this was Japan's participation in the 1873 Vienna World's Fair. Here, Machida Hisanari (fig. 3), who advanced art policy as an official representative for the Austrian Exposition Bureau, and Sano Tsunetami (fig. 4), vice president of the Bureau, are highlighted. First, we shall examine the movements surrounding this event.

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In 1868, the first year of the Meiji period, the Meiji government, in pursuit of its policy to establish Shinto as the national religion, issued the "*Shinbutsu Bunri-rei* (Decree on the Separation of Shinto and Buddhism)," thereby prohibiting the syncretic practices that had previously been observed at shrines and temples. However, this decree was subject to broad interpretation, leading to a nationwide movement to abolish Buddhism and destroy Buddhist statues and ritual objects (fig. 5). Upon assuming the position of *Daijo* bureaucrat of the Ministry of Education in 1870, Machida witnessed this situation and submitted a proposal for the construction of the *Shukokan* museum in April 1871 to protect cultural properties. This led to the Decree of the Cabinet on the "*Koki kyubutsu Hozon-kata* (Law for the Preservation of Old Cultural Properties)" in the same year. Subsequently, starting in 1872, the "*Kazoku Homotsu Chosa* (Investigation of Noble Treasures)" and the "*Jinshin Kensa* (*Jinshin* Survey)"—Research of Cultural Properties—were implemented.[24]

Around the same time, when the Meiji government decided to officially participate in the Vienna World's Fair at the end of 1871, the Austrian Exposition Bureau was established within the Grand Council of State. Under President Ōkuma Shigenobu and Vice President Sano, Machida was appointed as Imperial Commissioner for the Exposition. As preparation for the Vienna World's Fair, the *Yushima Seidō* Exposition, organized by the Ministry of Education's Bureau of Museums, was held in 1872 (fig. 6). The venue, the *Taiseiden* Hall, became the first building in Japan to be named a "museum" (fig. 7). The aforementioned "Investigation of Noble Treasures" and the "*Jinshin* Survey"

Fig. 5: OGAWA Kazumasa, Damaged Statue of Buddha, the Eastern Kondo (Main Hall), Kofukuji Temple in *Chokoku shashin cho*, 1888. © Tokyo National Museum. (https://webarchives.tnm.jp/)

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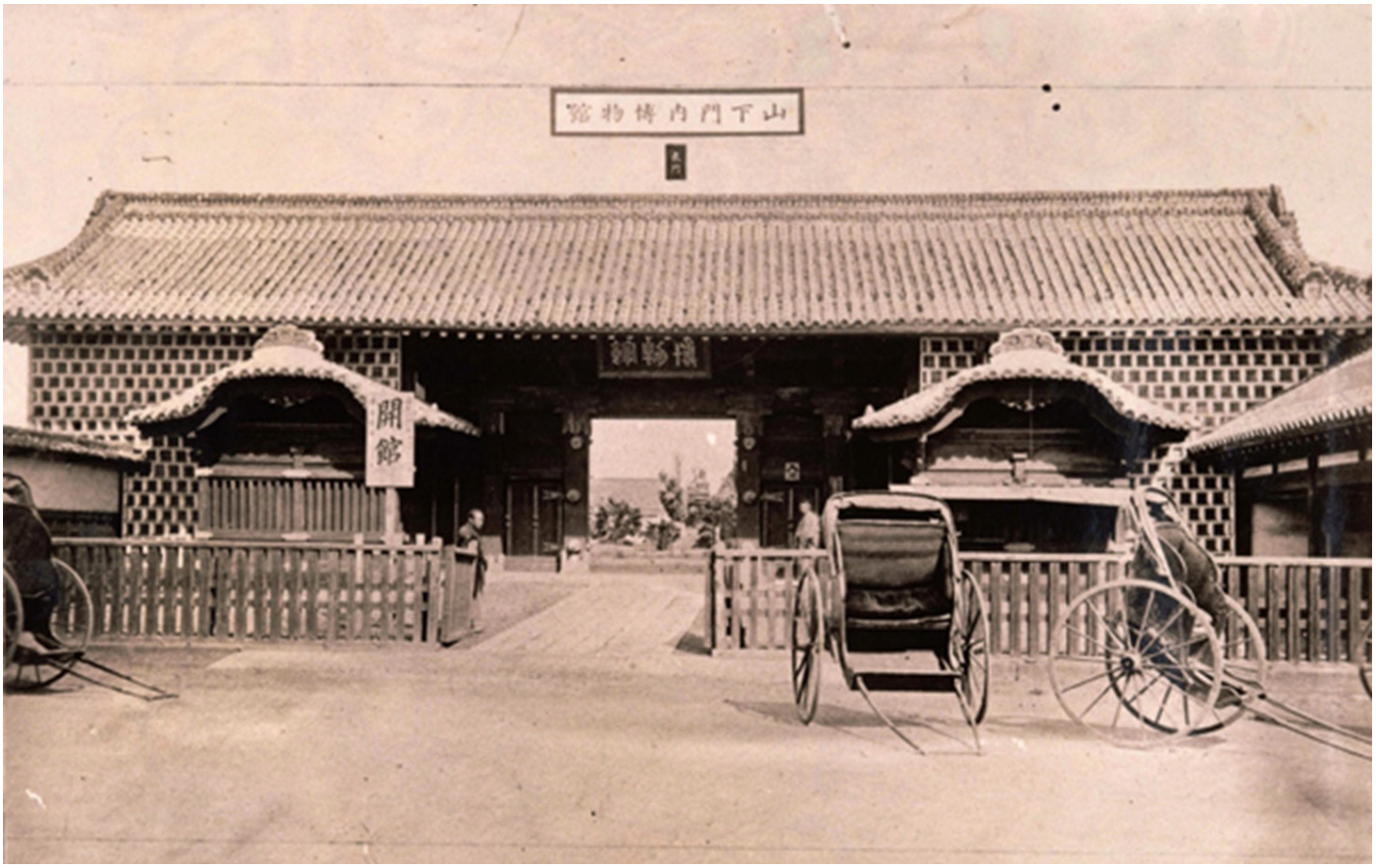
Fig. 6: YOKOYAMA Matsusaburō, Staff of the *Yushima Seidō* Exposition, 1872. The third from the left in the front row is Machida Hisanari.

Fig. 7: SHOSAI Ikkei, *Hakurankai zu: Moto shōheizaka seidō ni oite*, 1872. © Waseda University Library.

were conducted during this Exposition. Machida, who spearheaded these efforts, sought to protect cultural properties through the treasure survey conducted under the pretext of preparing exhibits for the Vienna World's Fair. Simultaneously, he plotted to have these treasures deposited or donated to museums.[25] In other words, the art policies of the early Meiji period were closely interrelated through expositions, treasure investigations, and the museums, with the primary objectives of safeguarding cultural heritage and systematically acquiring materials for museum collections.

In June 1873, Machida also submitted a proposal to the Grand Council of State advocating for the "necessi-

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ty of a grand museum." His model was not the South Kensington Museum, which focused on applied arts for industrial promotion, but rather the British Museum, which comprehensively housed books, cultural properties, and natural history materials.[26] Outlining his vision for a "Grand Museum," Machida opened the Exposition Bureau Museum in *Uchiyamashita-cho* in 1873 (fig. 8). There, he held exhibitions while simultaneously advancing the collection and protecting cultural properties.

Meanwhile, Sano Tsuneomi, Machida's superior and vice president of the Austrian Exposition Bureau, held a somewhat different view on the museum. Sano had listed the construction of a museum as one of the objectives for participating in the Vienna World's Fair (fig. 9). In the *Ōkoku Hakurankai Hōkokusho* (*Report of Austrian Exposition*) published by the Exposition Bureau, he dedicated one section to the museum, detailing its importance as follows.[27] He stated that while museums were originally "places for collecting and displaying books, rare artifacts, and antiquities," in recent years they had become "beneficial to the economy." He further noted that, after observing the inferiority of their own products at the Great Exhibition of 1851, the British established a museum together with its affiliated art school in South Kensington. This initiative was not intended "for the curious," but rather to "encourage industrial and commercial enterprise," which subsequently contributed to an increase in export revenues. Notably, the report highlights that, upon the establishment of the MFA, Boston in 1870, trustee Charles Perkins ex-

Fig. 8:
Wada Ichirō, Front Gate of the *Yamashita-mon-nai* Museum (*Uchiyamashita-cho* Museum), ca. 1873-1881.
© Tokyo National Museum. (https://webarchives.tnm.jp/)

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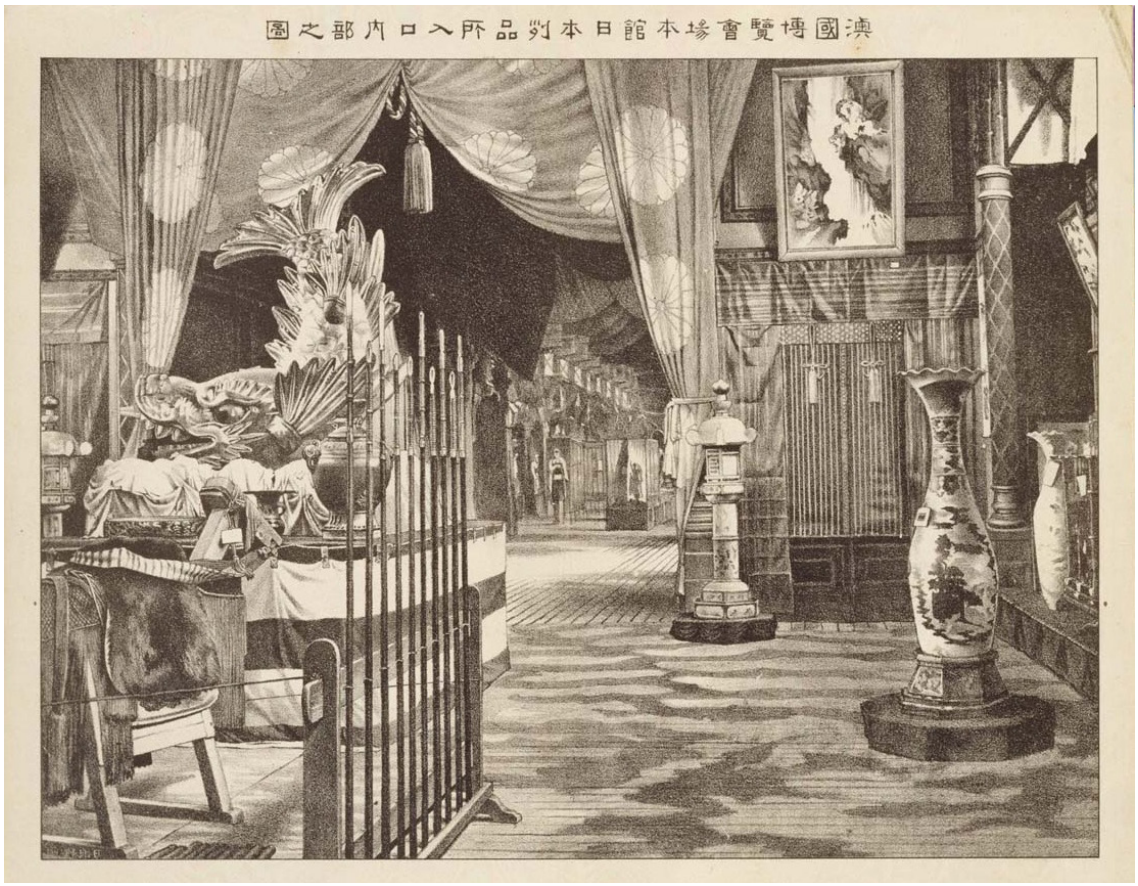


Fig. 9: "Japanese pavilion in the Austrian Exposition" in *Report of participation in the Austrian Exposition*, 1897. © Tokyo National Museum. (https://webarchives.tnm.jp/)

pressed a similar view, noting that the quality of British industrial design had made significant progress through the South Kensington Museum and its affiliated art school. The early Meiji museum in Japan and the emerging art museum in the United States shared the same common knowledge concerning the South Kensington's art policy.

At the Vienna World's Fair, the term "good taste" was introduced into Japan; however, it was translated as *fūga* and understood in terms of refinement and elegance, later extending to meanings such as "splendor" and "picturesque."[28] Crucially, the fundamental principle of South Kensington's "democratization of taste" failed to take root in Japan. Instead, "good taste" was construed as an aesthetic aligned with Western export and as a concept serving industrial utility.

Sano further proposed establishing an art school attached to the museum in Tokyo, modeled after the art school affiliated with the South Kensington Museum.[29] He explained that this art school would offer two departments—painting and sculpture, and crafts—to improve techniques beneficial to industry. Interconnecting the three organizations—museum, art school, and exposition—would serve public benefit. He envisioned that visitors would broaden their knowledge through museum exhibitions, acquire skills at the art school, and then exhibit outstanding crafts at the exposition to open the way for industrial advancement.

Sano, who took South Kensington as his model, invited the foreign advisor Gottfried Wagener (1831-1892) to serve as an advisor on art policy. Wagener, a German scientist, ar-

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rived in Japan in 1868. He instructed ceramics production in Arita, Hizen Domain, and taught at institutions including the University of Tokyo and Tokyo Technical School (later Tokyo Institute of Technology). During this period, he served as an advisory secretary for the Vienna and Philadelphia Expositions, dedicating himself to teaching industrial technology.

The *Report of Austrian Exposition* includes a "Report on the Establishment of the Tokyo Museum by Wagener" and a "Report on the Museum of Applied Arts." Additionally, a separate volume, "History of the Establishment and Management Regulations of the South Kensington Museum in London, England"[30] details the history, building, classification of collections, visitor numbers, and museum regulations of the South Kensington Museum. It notes that this booklet was presented by Philip Cunliffe-Owen (1828-1894),[31] the director of the South Kensington Museum, during the Vienna World's Fair.

Based on Wagener's suggestion, the *Kangyo-ryo* training school was actually established on the property of the *Uchiyamashita-cho* Museum for two years starting in 1875, operating as the technical training school attached to the museum that Sano had intended.[32] This may appear to be a museum-affiliated art school modeled after South Kensington, but in reality, it functioned more as a training school for craft techniques like ceramics than as an art school.

Meanwhile, the *Kōbu Bijutsu Gakkō*, Japan's first government-run art school, opened in 1875, and adopted educational method based on Italian art academies despite being established under the Ministry of Public Works, which was responsible for industrial promotion policies. Conversely, the drawing education initiated under the Ministry of Education in 1872, incorporated the British art education model.[33] That is, the early Meiji art education system featured higher art education under the Ministry of Public Works, adopting Italian art academy method, while elementary art education under the Ministry of Education adopted the British South Kensington method. This indicates that a unified art education system spanning elementary to higher levels was not established.

Japanese art education was introduced as the Western subject "Drawing."[34] The first Western art textbook was *Seiga Shinan* (*The Western Drawing Book*)[35] translated by Kawakami Tōgai (1828-1881). This original work has been identified as *The Illustrated Drawing Book*) by Robert Scott Burn (1825-1901).[36] As noted earlier, in Britain, the 23-stage national curriculum established by Henry Cole extended from general to specialized education, ensuring the widespread adoption of standardized art instruction across the country. Thus, Burn's *Drawing Book*, published in Scotland, can be seen as one such example, which clearly suggests the influence of South Kensington art education in early Meiji Japan. Noteworthy in the *Seiga Shinan* is the preface bearing the inscription "Fujiwara Ason Hisanari, August 1871," indicating Machida Hisanari contributed a passage.

It is a point worthy that the Ministry of Education had obtained art textbooks from Britain even before

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24547



10

Fig. 10: Josiah Conder, *View of Ueno Museum*, watercolor, ca. 1881. © Tokyo National Museum. (https://webarchives.tnm.jp/)

the Vienna World's Fair and introduced them as guides for school art education. This period coincided precisely with Machida submitting his proposal for the construction of the *Shukokan* museum to the Grand Council of State in April 1871, leading to the enactment of the Law for the Preservation of Old Cultural Properties, and the holding of the *Yushima Seidō* Exposition in September. Though not directly linked to museums, Machida—who modeled preserving cultural properties on the British Museum—likely drew inspiration from the South Kensington approach.

Early Meiji art policy featured two distinct visions of museums: Sano, who sought to fully adopt the South Kensington system—where exposition, museum, and training school collaborated for industrial promotion; and Machida, who pursued both the British Museum and South Kensington models—advancing exposition, museum, and art education to protect cultural properties. During this period, both Sano and Machida guided Christopher Dresser, a teacher from the South Kensington Art School who visited Japan in 1876, around the *Shōsō-in* Repository and various architectural sites across the country. They likely obtained the latest information during these visits.

The *Uchiyamashita-cho* Museum established by Machida was transferred to the Ministry of Home Affairs (renamed the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce in 1881) in 1875, placing it under industrial promotion policies. Finally, in 1882, a museum encompassing history, art, and natural materials opened in Ueno, with Machida appointed as its director (fig. 10). However, Machida was dismissed from the position after only seven months. Following subsequent personnel turmoil, the museum was transferred to the Imperial Household Ministry in 1886, entrusting Machida's vision to the next generation.

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The concept of an "Art Bureau" during the Mid-Meiji period (1880s)

Following Machida and Sano, who were involved in art administration in the early Meiji period, Ernest Fenollosa (fig. 11) and Okakura Kakuzō (fig. 12) were the central figures who advanced art administration in the mid-Meiji period. Fenollosa, who arrived in Japan in 1878 as a hired foreign expert, spent his first 12 years in Japan as a professor at the University of Tokyo and engaged in art education and protecting cultural properties for the Ministry of Education.[37] Okakura, a student of Fenollosa at the University of Tokyo, joined the Ministry of Education and worked alongside Fenollosa to establish art policy framework.

In 1884, his sixth year in Japan, Fenollosa was appointed by the Ministry of Education as a member of the Drawing Investigation Committee. Established to deliberate on three key issues—the methods of teaching drawing in elementary education, the founding of an art school, and the survey and preservation of cultural properties—the committee provided the framework within which Fenollosa, together with Okakura, advanced his proposals on art policy.[38]

What was the art policy Fenollosa and Okakura sought to achieve? Ultimately their goal was the establishment of the Art Bureau. Okakura, a Ministry of Education bureaucrat likely consulted Fenollosa about this idea. According to the recollections of Imaizumi Yusaku (1850-1931), around 1884, Okakura, who became a colleague at the Ministry of Education, heard from Imaizumi—who had experience in France—about French art administration. This led Okakura to begin with the idea of establishing an Art Bureau that would govern expositions, exhibitions, and art schools.[39]

In a draft titled "Proposals Concerning the Administration of Japanese Art,"[40] which Fenollosa wrote in 1886 specifically for the Art Bureau, he first explained the effectiveness of export trade through practical arts and crafts, then stated the following:

1. Establishment of a school education system for artists and designers, and establishment of art schools teaching painting, sculpture, and crafts (including architecture)

2. Organization of art exhibitions to enhance public education

3. Establishment of art museums for academic research, preservation, and the education of the general public

Furthermore, it proposed the establishment of an Art Bureau within the Ministry of Education to oversee these initiatives. Notably, Fenollosa's proposal retained the framework of the South Kensington art system—art school, exposition, and museum—but added conservation roles to the museum's mandate.

Okakura also proposed an idea for an art school and submitted a draft curriculum titled "Proposal for Drawing Education".[41] The method, which starts with line drawing and leads to design, follows Henry Cole's curriculum. However, while the South Kensington method's foundation was line drawing and shading, with drawing and color painting added on top, Fenollosa's idea uniquely replaced these with line

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drawing and tonal values.

While Fenollosa's idea for an art education system closely resembles the art education framework established by Cole, the source of this inspiration is referenced in a letter Fenollosa acknowledged to Minister of Education Mori Arinori.

> *Our method of art education, which is part of our careful deliberation, is neither entirely new nor an obscure, unfamiliar concept. It follows the direction pursued by several art schools in Europe and America, particularly the South Kensington Art School—namely, a method that begins with the principles of design and then continuously expands into the fields of painting, sculpture, and decorative arts. The novelty lies in the completeness and logical consistency with which we have refined it.*[42]

In this letter, Fenollosa clearly states that his art education curriculum was perfected through improvements based on the art education of South Kensington.[43]

Walter Smith's *Art Education, Scholastic and Industrial*, published in Boston, is considered a key reference for Fenollosa.[44] After completing his graduate studies at Harvard, Fenollosa studied at the Massachusetts Normal Art School founded by Smith, and would certainly have known Smith, who was the school's



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Fig. 11: Ernest Francisco Fenollosa (1853-1908) © The Fenollosa Society of Japan.

Fig. 12: OKAKURA Kakuzō (Tenshin, 1863-1913)

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24547

principal at the time. Smith's book covered not only American but also European art schools in Britain and France, and included curricula ranging from public schools to art academies, offering a comprehensive overview of the entire art education system. It was considered the ideal reference for designing the curriculum of the newly established art school in Japan.

Based on this preparatory work, in 1886, Fenollosa and Okakura were commissioned to investigate the art administration in Western countries, with Hamao Arata as a chairman. Over the course of nine months, they conducted an inspection tour of the United States, France, Italy, Spain, Austria, Germany, and Britain, focusing on art schools, museums, and expositions.

Upon returning from his inspection tour of Europe and the United States, Fenollosa submitted his "Report on Western Art Administration" and made the following proposal.[45] He argued that Japanese art, which does not distinguish between fine art and decorative art, could dominate the world market and contribute to national wealth through trade. To achieve this, he advocated establishing art museums as sources of design inspiration and art schools with educational systems capable of producing outstanding art and crafts. Furthermore, he argued that architecture encompassing all arts and crafts should be integrated into the educational system. He proposed establishing a Domestic Architecture Bureau to promote exports of arts and crafts suitable for interior decoration, and that this bureau should be integrated under the Foreign Trade Control Office to manage exports. Consequently, he stated that these four entities—Art Museum, Art School, Domestic Architecture Bureau, and Foreign Trade Control Office—should execute unified plan under a single administration.

Fenollosa's approach to promoting the arts represents a significant advancement over his earlier "Proposals for the Art Administration of Japan," which drew inspiration from the art policies of South Kensington prior to his European inspection tour. This is most notably evident in the shift from a pre-tour focus on "art expositions" to a clear emphasis on the "art trade". Notably, he shifted from relying solely on expositions to proposing the establishment of a Domestic Architecture Bureau and a Foreign Trade Management Office.

Furthermore, his pre-inspection tour proposal broadly categorized the organization and teaching methods of art schools, whereas his revised proposal specifically listed two distinct institutions: a School of Painting and Sculpture and a School of Design. This indicates a clear distinction between an art academy and a design school, similar to the South Kensington model. However, Fenollosa specifically noted that "Japanese art does not distinguish between fine art and decorative art," highlighting the characteristic of Japanese art as a synthesis of both, an integrated comprehensive art form.

The Establishment of the Imperial Museum and Tokyo Art School

While Fenollosa and Okakura envisioned establishing an Art Bureau

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24547

to unify art administration, the political situation had changed dramatically following their return to Japan, which ultimately stalled the initiative. Of the institutions Fenollosa advocated for— "Art Museum, Art School, Domestic Architecture Bureau, and Foreign Trade Administration Office"—only the "Art Museum" and "Art School" would ultimately be realized.

After returning to Japan, Fenollosa submitted a "Proposals for the Imperial Fine Arts Museum" to the Ministry of the Imperial Household.[46] Its draft stated, "immediate and proactive measures should be taken for the preservation, research, and introduction of art materials to the world," strongly advocating for the establishment of the Imperial Fine Arts Museums. Fenollosa specifically referred to art museums specializing in cultural properties, rather than the general museum encompassing the humanities and natural history that had already opened in Ueno.[47] Furthermore, interestingly, Fenollosa also touched upon its personnel, nominating Imaizumi Yusaku as Director of Research, Machida Hisanari as Director of Preservation and Exhibitions, and Okakura Kakuzō as Head Curator. While Machida's appointment did not actualize, the lineage from Machida to Fenollosa and Okakura is noteworthy when considering the continuity of museum policy.

Fenollosa and Okakura undertook several surveys of historic shrines, temples, and ancient artworks in the western regions by the Ministry of Education. During their 1888 survey in Kyoto, Okakura delivered a speech titled "In Support of the Establishment of an Art Museum".[48] Drawing on his museum inspection tours in Europe and the Unites States, Okakura explained the functions of a museum as threefold: "preservation, research, and a grand spectacle for the capital." He then illustrated the necessity of building a museum in Japan by citing examples of museum types and their histories. He envisioned that Nara should house ancient Buddhist art from the Tenpyō to the Heian period, comparable to Rome; Tokyo should gather the essence of Tokugawa Shogunate art and Asian artifacts, modeling itself on the British Museum; and Kyoto should collect imperial artworks, analogous to the Louvre in Paris. And finally he concluded by stating that "it is my most ardent desire that these three museums shine the light of Japanese art upon the world." Here, Okakura's description of the museum in Tokyo, modeled after the British Museum, clearly inherits the ideal museum vision embraced by Machida. However, as Fenollosa stated in his "Proposal for the Imperial Fine Art Museum," Okakura also envisioned a museum focused exclusively on fine arts and crafts.

It should be noted that Okakura, in discussing the museum's function of "inquiry," advocated not only research for specialists but also the cultivation of "public taste," even proposing an art school attached to the museum. While those who advanced art policy in the mid-Meiji period accurately understood South Kensington's notion of "taste," they did not embrace its underlying principle. Rather, they called for an art system serving industrial promotion. For them, art remained a lofty pursuit, and the primary purpose of establishing museums lay in

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24547

the preservation of precious antiquities.

Kuki Ryūichi (1852-1931), who became Secretary of the Imperial Household Agency, formulated an idea for a museum specializing in history and fine arts based on Fenollosa's proposals. The following year, he established the Imperial Museums in Tokyo, Kyoto, and Nara, assuming the position of first director, and appointed Okakura as Curator of the art department. Meanwhile, the Bureau of Expositions, previously linked to the museums, was separated and transferred to the General Affairs Bureau within the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce.

The "Art School" initiative also progressed: the Tokyo Art School was established in 1887 and opened two years later in 1889. Fenollosa and Okakura promptly began guiding the school, drawing on the success of their European and American inspection tours and their distinctive perspectives on art education.

Fenollosa appears to have structured the art school's curriculum based on Smith's *Art Education, Scholastic and Industrial*. The first exercise in Fenollosa's *Gakaku* (Design) class was freehand line drawing practice. The various line samples used here can be found in South Kensington method drawing texts, and Smith's book also details the method of copying onto slate.[49] Furthermore, Fenollosa's omission of drawing plaster figures from the curriculum can be attributed to Smith's reluctance toward it as he promoted industrial design.[50]

Notably, the South Kensington curriculum introduced by Fenollosa should not be mistaken as the root of design education in Japan. Fenollosa aimed for a fusion of East and West through a curriculum combining the South Kensington method of art education with the traditional Kano school painting method.

South Kensington's Art Policy and the Mission of Museums in the Meiji Period

The triadic art system of expositions, museums, and art schools, originating in South Kensington, spread rapidly across Europe, the United States, and Japan—eager for modernization and industrial development—through its participation in the Vienna World's Fair. However, in early Meiji Japan, it can hardly be said that this democratic ideal was understood. Moreover, its reception was far from uniform, and ultimately the comprehensive South Kensington art policy never materialized as an administrative framework.

Despite the fact that bureaucrats had been engaged in efforts to adopt this system since the early Meiji period, why did it fail to achieve implementation in Japan? Although this system was introduced in Japan as part of industrial promotion policies during the early Meiji period, its components were implemented separately. This fragmented adoption can be attributed to the compartmentalized structure of early Meiji art administration, in which expositions and museums fell under the Ministry of Home Affairs, art schools under the Ministry of Public Works, and art education under the Ministry of Education. In addition, it should not be overlooked that Japanese museums, from the very beginning of the Meiji period, bore the significant mission of protecting cultural properties—a responsibil-

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24547

ity to which Machida devoted considerable effort.

Machida and Sano may be regarded as the earliest figures to recognize the significance of the integrated art system for industrial promotion. Perhaps Machida was, in fact, the first to put the comprehensive South Kensington art policy into practice as an institutional framework. His involvement in expositions, museums, and art education revealed this triadic art system.

After Machida's departure, it was Fenollosa and Okakura who envisioned the Art Bureau to oversee the entire art system. These bureaucrats likely aspired to emulate Henry Cole's role in Meiji Japan. Okakura, an Education bureaucrat, may have been entrusted with this grand idea by Machida, who had served in both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Home Affairs. Fenollosa and Okakura's 1886 inspection tour of Europe and the United States, particularly their visit to South Kensington, must have been a journey fueled by great ambition.

However, Okakura's role as a bureaucrat limited his influence. This ambitious plan for the Art Bureau within the Ministry of Education advanced only through the involvement of Kuki Vice Minister of Education, and Hamao Arata, Director of Bureau of Academic Affairs. Imaizumi reflects on this point.[51]

> *Only Baron Hamao, Baron Kuki, Okakura, and myself knew about the plan to establish the Art Bureau. Baron Hamao and Baron Kuki lobbied the higher-ups, Okakura handled the groundwork, and I served as secretary. That is how Japan finally came to have an art school, a museum, and various other art-related institutions. It was entirely the work of these four individuals.*

Certainly, as bureaucrats, these four were essential, and without Kuki's particular leadership, it likely could not have been advanced. However, it was actually Fenollosa and Okakura who formulated the policies for the Imperial Museum and the Tokyo Art School and began drafting the initial plans.

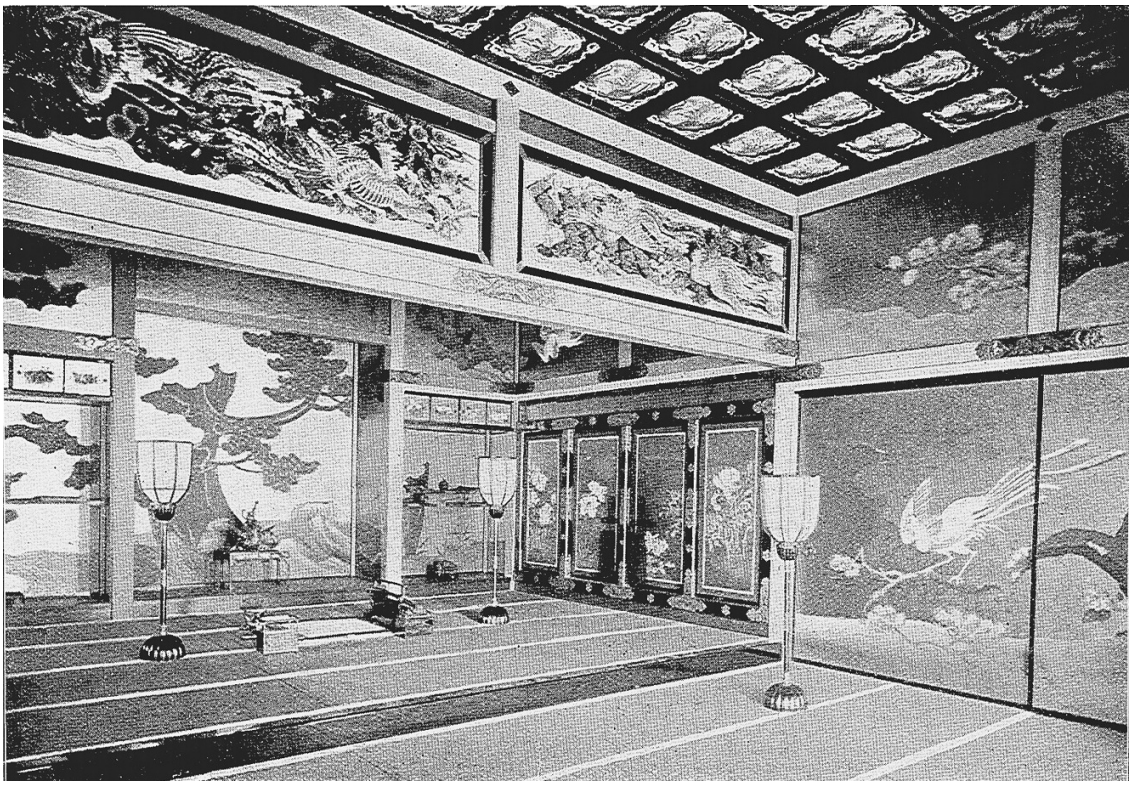
Although Fenollosa and Okakura's idea for the Art Bureau never came to fruition, the integration of the exposition, museum, and art school progressed steadily under Okakura. A notable example of this integration is the "Kusunoki Masashige Statue" project at the Tokyo Art School. In 1890, the Sumitomo family commissioned the Tokyo Art School to create a bronze statue of feudal warlord, Kusunoki Masashige. A design by students and faculty from the Painting Course was selected, and the Sculpture Course professor oversaw its production. This project, commissioned from outside, was rooted in Okakura's idea for an Art Bureau during his tenure as the school's principal.[52]

Subsequently, the art school's commission project made significant progress at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Against the backdrop of diplomatic factors—expanding exports and revising unequal treaties—the Meiji government's objective was to

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24547



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Fig. 13: The Japanese pavilion *Ho-o-den* (Phenix Hall) at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, 1893. © National Diet Library.

Fig. 14: Jodan-no-ma (Central Hall) of the *Ho-o-den* at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago; in Okakura Kakuzo, The *Hooden*, 1893. © National Diet Library.

demonstrate to the Western world that Japan was a civilized nation by presenting a systematic history of art. At the Chicago Exposition Bureau, Kuki served as Vice President, while Okakura, Councilor of the Secretariat and Principal of the Tokyo Art School, effectively led the project. Faculty members from the Tokyo Art School were responsible for the interior decoration of the Japanese Pavilion, the *Ho-o-den* (Phoenix Hall), modeled after the *Ho-o-do* (Phoenix Hall) of Byōdō-in Temple.[53]

At the Chicago Exposition, the idea of an Art Bureau encompassing the exposition, art school, and museum was realized in modified forms: through participation in the exposition, the interior decoration of the Phoenix Hall by the art school, and acquisitions for the Imperial Museum (fig. 13, 14). However, its nature differed from that of the early Meiji period. Its purpose shifted from promoting art for industry to

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24547

advocating art for art's sake—that is, from industrial promotion to aestheticism. This shift can be attributed to the fact that, under the policy of promoting industry in the early Meiji period, the works exhibited at the World's Fair were sold locally and acquired by museums in various countries. By contrast, most of the works exhibited at the Chicago Exposition, in which Okakura was involved, were acquired by the Imperial Museum. Okakura probably aimed not for export-oriented arts and crafts admired in Japonisme, but for works of art collected in museums and integrated into art education. It may be said that, under the banner of Aestheticism, Okakura realized the concept of an "Art Bureau" encompassing expositions, museums, and art schools through the Chicago World's Fair.

The South Kensington Museum, which had been widely adopted as a model by many Western countries, had become outdated by the mid-1880s. In 1893, the South Kensington Museum separated into the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Science Museum. At the art museum, the emphasis shifted from educational focus to aesthetic and historical perspectives. Around 1875, art schools also began to shift from "art for industry" to "art for art's sake." Similarly, the MFA, Boston transformed from an educational museum serving industry into a museum dedicated to enlightening through beauty, a change reflected in its new building after relocation in 1909.

Meiji Japan's museums certainly adopted and implemented South Kensington system, transitioning from industrial promotion to aestheticism. However, behind this shift the urgent mission to protect cultural properties—entrusted from Machida to Fenollosa and Okakura— became apparent. This mission could only be realized by upholding the grand principle of industrial promotion.

The establishment of Japan's modern art system during the Meiji period was a national strategy aimed at positioning the nation on equal footing with the Western powers as a modern state. From the proposal for the construction of the *Shūkokan* in 1871, through the opening of the museum in 1882, and culminating in the establishment of the Imperial Museum in 1889, the formation of museums in Meiji Japan was consistently guided by indispensable insights derived from the art policy of South Kensington.

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24547

Endnotes:

1 A bureaucrat from the Satsuma domain. Established the Museum at the 1872 *Yushima Seidō* Exposition, becoming its first director in 1882.

2 A bureaucrat from the Saga domain. Participated in the 1867 Paris Exposition and the 1873 Vienna World's Fair. President of the House of Peers, Privy Councilor, and other positions.

3 A bureaucrat and art theorist. Served at the Imperial Museum and as principal of the Tokyo Art School. From 1905, curator of the Department of Chinese and Japanese Art at the MFA, Boston.

4 American philosopher and scholar of East Asian art; professor at the University of Tokyo from 1878, and over the course of four visits, spent a total of eighteen years in Japan, contributing to the founding of the Tokyo Art School. From 1890, curator of the Japanese department at the MFA, Boston.

5 References consulted on Henry Cole and South Kensington Museum: Coll 1991; Baker, Richardson 1999; Burton 1999; Bonython 2003.

6 Quinn 2011. With regard to "taste", reference was also made to Suga 2005, pp. 25-116.

7 Nakayama 1995, pp. 193-222.

8 MacDonald 1990, pp. 212-219.

9 Dohmen 2020, p. 31.

10 References consulted on Christopher Dresser: Stuart 1993; Whiteway 2004.

11 Suzuki 1974, pp. 85-94.

12 For discussions on the formative period of American art museums andMFA, Boston, see Gilman 1921; Alexander 1997, pp. 51-66; Curran 2016, pp. 52-79.

13 Boston 1876, p. 8.

14 Perkins 1870, pp. 1-3.

15 Perkins 1870, p. 15.

16 Conforti 1997, pp. 38-40.

17 Boston 1876. The Japanese government exhibited ceramics, metalwork, and other crafts in the main building of the Centennial International Exposition in Philadelphia, and constructed a Japanese-style tea house.

18 Perkins 1870, p. 28.

19 Korzenik 1985, p. 200. While Perkins's vision was never fully realized, it lives on in the present-day academic city of Boston.

20 Dean 1924, pp. 5-9.

21 Smith 1872.

22 Green 1966, p. 5.

23 For research on art policy during the Meiji period in Japan, see the following references; Sato 1999. Norota 2015. Previous research on Japanese art administration during the Meiji period has examined in detail the establishment of domestic institutions. However, there has been almost no reference to the art policies of South Kensington, nor any analysis of what sources were consulted or consideration of the nature of their influence.

24 Shiina 2022.

25 Norota 2015, pp. 136-166.

26 Machida traveled to Britain in 1865 at the end of Edo period as a Satsuma feudal clan student and studied at the University of London. As Machida indicated, the British

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24547

Museum at that time was a comprehensive museum containing books and humanities and natural history materials.

27 Ōkoku 1875, p. 112.

28 Norota 2015, pp. 111-135.

29 Ōkoku 1875, p. 6.

30 Ōkoku 1876.

31 The second director of the South Kensington Museum (served 1873-1893).

32 Norota 2015, pp. 228-231.

33 Kaneko 1999, pp. 160-170; Takeuchi 2016, pp. 99-122.

34 Ueno 2007, pp. 35-37.

35 Kawakami 1871.

36 A Scottish engineer who authored works on agriculture, architecture, mechanical engineering, and drawing.

37 Basic references on Ernest Fenollosa: Chisolm 1963; Yamaguchi 1982; Murakata 1982; 1984; 1987.

38 Yamaguchi 1982, pp. 278-290.

39 Imaizumi Yūsaku, "Tokyo Art School: Retrospective," cited in Tokyo 1987, pp. 32-33.

40 Murakata 1982, pp. 54-61, p.336.

41 Okakura 1980, pp. 341-343, 486.

42 Murakata, 1982, p. 121.

43 Regarding the South Kensington Art School, publications included; Richard 1853; 1876.

44 Smith 1872, and also Fenollosa might have referred to Smith 1882.

45 Murakata 1982, pp. 88-98.

46 Murakata 1982, pp. 297-305.

47 By the time Fenollosa conducted his inspection in 1887, the natural history department of the British Museum had already become independent as the Natural History Museum in 1881.

48 Okakura 1889, pp. 52-64.

49 Smith 1872, p. 70.

50 McDonald 1990, p. 342.

51 Tokyo 1987, p. 34.

52 Tokyo 1987, p. 178.

53 Yamada 2021, pp. 123-133.

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Japanese Museums: Challenges, Prospects, and a Life-Death Perspective on Cultural Inheritance[1]

Ryō Furuta

Keywords:
Cultural Inheritance; View on life and death; Symbolic immortality; Memorial service



ABSTRACT:

This paper discusses the challenges facing Japanese museums, and explores their prospects, with a focus on the inheritance of objects. It proposes a novel perspective on cultural inheritance by applying the concept of "life and death" to museum practices. The current difficulties confronting Japanese museums regarding cultural inheritance are deeply rooted in their historical development, a path significantly shaped by European models. These European museums were established with the aim of using their comprehensive collections to contribute to social education, and in the 19th-century evolved into cultural facilities essential for modern nation-building. While Japanese museums largely followed the same trajectory, they now face structural and systemic deterioration, leaving museums increasingly strained. The situation necessitates a reconsideration of the traditional modernist approaches to cultural inheritance.The paper, using the keywords "symbolic immortality" and "memorial ceremony," which are concepts of life and death, considers new meanings of cultural inheritance in museums. For example, organizing exhibitions on the anniversaries of an artist's birth or death is another way museums can transmit cultural heritage associated with individuals and objects, and can also be considered a form of memorial service. Such practices not only serve as forms of remembrance but also actively ensure the "symbolic immortality" of both creators and their works, thereby enriching the methods of cultural transmission.

L'articolo affronta le sfide che i musei giapponesi stanno affrontando e ne esplora le prospettive future, concentrandosi sull'eredità degli oggetti. Propone una prospettiva innovativa sull'eredità culturale applicando il concetto di "vita e morte" alle pratiche museali. Le difficoltà attuali che i musei giapponesi incontrano nell'ambito dell'eredità culturale sono profondamente radicate nel loro sviluppo storico, un percorso fortemente influenzato dai modelli europei. I musei europei sono stati fondati con l'obiettivo di utilizzare le loro collezioni per contribuire all'educazione sociale e, nel XIX secolo, si sono evoluti in strutture culturali essenziali per la costruzione della nazione moderna. Pur avendo seguito in gran parte lo stesso percorso, i musei giapponesi oggi affrontano un deterioramento strutturale e sistemico che li mette sempre più sotto pressione. Questa situazione richiede una rivalutazione degli approcci tradizionali e modernisti all'eredità culturale. Il saggio, utilizzando le parole chiave "immortalità simbolica" e "cerimonia commemorativa", concetti legati alla vita e alla morte, considera nuovi significati dell'eredità culturale nei musei. Ad esempio, organizzare mostre in occasione degli anniversari della nascita o della morte di un artista rappresenta un ulteriore modo in cui i musei possono trasmettere il patrimonio culturale associato a individui e oggetti, e può essere considerato una forma di commemorazione. Tali pratiche non solo fungono da forme di memoria, ma assicurano attivamente l'"immortalità simbolica" sia dei creatori sia delle loro opere, arricchendo così i metodi di trasmissione culturale.

Opening Picture:

Fig. 1: Inside the storage facility at Toride Annex, The University Art Museum of the Tokyo University of the Arts.

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Japanese Museums and Views on Life and Death

This paper aligns with the editorial objective of MMD 5, which is to promote academic discussion on the history of collections and exhibitions in Japanese museums, as well as various contemporary issues. By incorporating a uniquely Japanese perspective on life and death, this paper introduces a new dimension to the discussion on the past and future of Japanese museums. However, this paper is not based on faith in any particular religion (Buddhism or Shintō). Instead, it analyzes characteristics of Japanese customs, behavior, and thought, applying them to museological discourse.

Preliminary ideas have been presented in other forums, such as oral presentations outlining this topic and in newspaper interviews.[2] However, this paper represents the first formal academic publication of this research, incorporating new and more in-depth analysis.

To begin this consideration of the theme of museums and views on life and death, it is useful to recall statement from T. Marinetti's *Futurist Manifesto* (1909) as an early 20th-century criticism of 19th-century museums.

> *Let one pay a visit there each year as one visits one's dead once a year... That we can allow! ... Deposit flowers even once a year at the feet of the Gioconda, if you will!... But to walk daily in the museums with our sorrows, our fragile courage and our anxiety, that is inadmissible!.. Would you, then, poison yourselves? Do you want to decay?*[3]

This manifesto, which marked the founding of Futurism, also served as an incitement for a movement in which young Italian artists rejected all established views of art and sought to establish a new art form. In this passage, the museum is portrayed as a relic of the past and is rejected through its comparison to a tomb.

More than 100 years later, in March 2024, in Japan, the exhibition *Does the Future Sleep Here?—Revisiting the museum's response to contemporary art after 65 years* was held at the National Museum of Western Art in Tokyo. The museum director Tanaka Masayuki explained that the purpose of the exhibition was to reexamine the significance of a museum specializing in Western classical art in contemporary Japan, particularly in relation to contemporary art. At the same time, citing Theodor W. Adorno and Douglas Crimp, Tanaka stated that the initiative was aimed at preventing the museum from becoming a "graveyard of artworks" or a "ruin," a place devoid of life.[4]

Adorno, in *The Valéry Proust Museum* (1953), claimed that the connection between "museum" and "mausoleum" is not merely phonetic, and that a museum is like a tomb where artworks are buried.[5] In other words, this idea that museums are akin to graves from a contemporary perspective began in Europe in the early 20th century, and has persisted to the present day in Japan. In fact, for contemporary artists, having their work housed in a museum

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is considered "*entering the grave*," and the identification tag on which the work is registered and prepared for storage and exhibition can be compared to a tombstone.[6]

However, the tomb itself is neither meaningless nor negative; on the contrary, it is a form of cultural inheritance that has great significance. The purpose of this essay is not to criticize museums that are equated with the tomb, but rather to reconsider Japanese museums from the perspective of life and death, which are closely related to culture.

This discussion begins with still life painting. In traditional Japanese painting, there was no term or concept for still life painting. There were similar genres entitled *Sosaizu* (Vegetable Paintings) or *Kasozu* (Fruit and Vegetable Paintings), but they differed in their origins from Western still life painting. This difference likely stems from a motivation rooted in the Japanese tradition of an intimate gratitude for the food harvested from the mountains and fields.

In Europe, this genre is known to have flourished in Flanders in the 17th century, but in Dutch, English, and other Germanic languages, it is rendered *Still-Leven*, *Stillleben*, or *still life*. In Italian, on the other hand, it is *natura morta* (dead nature). While referring to the same motionless object, still life suggests something that is static, but still retains the possibility of being alive. On the other hand, *natura morta* implies something that was once alive but has died and become material. This contrasts with the term *natura vivente* (living nature) for a portrait. These linguistic expressions surrounding still-life paintings reveal a subtle discrepancy between the north and south of Europe, and between the West and the East in terms of the views of life and death concerning objects.

Relating this to the act of museum collecting, it can be argued that the origin of museums lies in the attempt to collect inanimate objects and preserve them forever, whether as still life or *natura morta*. In the modern Western world, all kinds of objects were collected, classified, and organized in accordance with the desire for knowledge. The institution of the museum embodied a way of presenting knowledge based on Western rational thought, that is, enlightenment through display.

As is clear from this origin, even if museums have been criticized as places where the dead are buried, in Europe the items stored in museums are merely objects (materials) and are considered to be unrelated to human life and death. On the other hand, when the Japanese term "*shizō* (dead storage)" is used in relation to museums, it often refers to the state in which collected items remain in storage, i.e., a failure in the museum's primary functions. In other words, by linking the state of unused items with "human death," the term problematizes the issue of their underutilization.

Issues facing museums today regarding the inheritance of objects

The museum, which emerged as a hall of enlightenment in the modern Western world, was positioned in the 18th century as a facility for the public display of royal and private collections, and in the 19th century as a place where all objects

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acquired through imperialism and colonialism could be used for public and social education. This naturally reinforced the evaluation of objects based on the objective accumulation of knowledge in the form of scholarship and science. The museum's status as an authority was at times reinforced by the state, its political patrons, or its public credibility, making it an indispensable cultural institution in the development of the modern nation. This trend in Europe was also true in Japan. The Japanese museums created in the Meiji period were direct adaptations of the 19th-century European model.[7]

Until the end of World War II, Japan had few public museums other than national museums, and only a handful of art galleries. It was only after the war that the National Museum of Modern Art was established. The Museum Law enacted in 1951 encompassed zoos, botanical gardens, aquariums, science museums, and other museums, and at the time of its enactment, the total number of museums was around 200.

Large museums were built throughout the country during the 1970s and 1980s. Art museums were established in almost all prefectures, and the Imperial Household Agency's *Sannomaru Shozokan* (The Museum of the Imperial Collections) opened within the Imperial Palace in the 1990s. Approximately 120 years have passed since the establishment of the Tokyo National Museum in 1872. At the midway point, the Museum Act of 1951 positioned the nation's various museums, each with its own parent organization, as institutions for social education. Today, the total number of museums exceeds 5,700. Consequently, Japan now has one of the highest numbers of museums in the world. However, facilities fully fulfilling the functions of preservation, research, and exhibition are largely limited to national museums, major public museums, and a few private museums.

With the April 2023 revision of the Museum Law, the Japanese government has broadened the requirements for museum establishment and is encouraging the registration of small-scale museums that are engaged in unique activities. However, while there are few tangible benefits, the administrative and financial burdens of maintaining standards for small, under-resourced museums have limited the number of newly registered museums to approximately 250 to date.[8]

Although there are a variety of problems faced by Japanese museums as a whole with such a history, this paper will focus on the inheritance of objects in museums. The following section, therefore, describes the current situation in this regard.

Japanese museums are currently facing serious storage problems. Thirty or forty years after construction, many museums across the country have reached full capacity and are unable to secure new space.[9] Securing storage space has become an urgent and unavoidable issue for Japanese museums.[10] In addition to the space issue, the enormous amount of energy required for storage equipment to maintain a constant temperature and humidity not only puts a strain on budgets, but this energy consumption also poses a challenge to decarbonization efforts.

The following is not a general state-

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ment, but rather a discussion based on the actual situation at the University Art Museum of Tokyo University of the Arts (hereinafter referred to as Geidai Art Museum), where the author works, drawing on the author's experience serving as a trustee and collection committee member at other museums.

First, the reality of the workplace has become increasingly apparent in recent years: the museum's ideal workload of collecting, maintaining, managing, and exhibiting objects is disproportionate to the number of curators and other professionals who actually work there. These problems have contributed to the structural obsolescence and deterioration of the museum system, leading to professional burnout. The maintenance of the hardware environment, such as exhibition rooms and storage facilities, has become a significant burden. This is compounded by the fact that extreme weather conditions caused by climate change have resulted in flooding and power outages, and the combination of budget cuts and rising commodity prices has not only hindered the maintenance of facilities, but has also had a direct impact on the retention of human resources.

On the other hand, over the past 20 years or so, another problem has arisen concerning collections: the Tokyo University of the Arts has a tradition of purchasing the best graduation works from each year's graduating class and acquiring them as part of the museum's collection. In its nearly 140 years since its founding, the museum has collected about 20,000 works of art as reference materials for art education and about 10,000 student works. In recent years, the categories of painting, sculpture, and crafts that were central to 19th-century museums have been collapsing, and the museum's collection now includes concepts, data, and installations that lack a stable physical form. This has presented a serious challenge to the management of the Geidai Art Museum, which is responsible for housing the latest student works (fig.1).[11]

For example, recent student works may be in the form of data, such as video or sound files. However, these are often stored in the form of USB memory sticks and CDs. This raises questions about the meaning and long-term viability of storing such media as permanent collection materials. The management of servers for storing works is a necessity, but sufficient future-proofing measures have not been taken.

In addition, there are cases where works made of extremely fragile materials or materials with limited lifespans, such as rubber or Styrofoam, have to be stored. The dilemma is that eventually, works that no longer convey the original intent of their creation due to deterioration will remain dormant in storage facilities.

Methods of cultural inheritance in Japan

These challenges necessitate a re-evaluation of how museums approach cultural inheritance. In the contemporary art world, the relationship between objects and people has changed, and the people who created them (artists) have become more important than the objects (works) that are created and

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24548



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bequeathed. The museum of the future, especially the art museum, is not expected to inherit objects in the 19th-century sense. There is an imminent need to reexamine for whom and for what purpose preservation should occur, as well as what should be preserved and passed down.

Therefore, while it is a basic premise that a museum is an institution that preserves and passes on objects themselves, this section will discuss alternative methods of cultural transmission, and examine Japanese characteristics, citing several examples.

The first is the *Shikinen Sengū*, a traditional event of the Japanese Shintō religion (fig.2). Every 20 years, the Ise Jingū Shrine is rebuilt in the same ancient style, and all of the shrine buildings, costumes, and treasures (approximately 2,500 items) are replaced with new ones. This is a Shintō ritual that began in the 7th century and has continued uninterrupted to the present day.

The concept is that by periodically renewing the dwelling places of the gods and replacing sacred treasures with entirely new ones, the divine authority of the deities is eternally preserved and continually rejuvenated. This notion, largely absent from Western thought rooted in monotheism, remains a part of contemporary Japanese spiritual culture. At Ise Grand Shrine, this has recently been termed the concept of *Tokowaka* (“everlasting youth”) and positioned as one aspect of Japan’s

Fig. 1:
Inside the storage facility at Toride Annex, The University Art Museum of the Tokyo University of the Arts. The new storage facility, completed in 2024, includes an anteroom called the *engaging storage room (Visible storage)* where s select works of the collection are stored and exhibited, and is open to the public. This room has a small window that allows visitors to peer into the adjacent storage facilities.

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24548



2

spiritual culture.[12] Consequently, this ritual, with a history spanning over 1,300 years, functions as a vital method for the transmission of tradition in crucial aspects of Japanese culture, namely the forms and techniques of its sacred architecture and treasures.

The *Shikinen Sengū* ceremony is incompatible with the 19th century museum concept, which places the permanent preservation of objects at its core, and recreating it could even be seen as the destruction of cultural property. On the other hand, these traditional rituals themselves are recognized by ICOM under the concept of intangible heritage. The "Heritage" section of ICOM's *Key Concepts in Museology* states the following:

For some years the notion of heritage, essentially defined on the basis of a western concept of transmission, has felt the impact of the globalisation of ideas, such as the relatively recent concept of intangible heritage. This concept, of Asian origin (in particular from Japan and Korea) is founded on the idea that transmission, to be effective, must essentially be done by human carriers, from whence evolved the idea of living human treasures.[13]

Fig. 2: Scenery of Ise Shrine, Gekū: Photo by the author 2025.

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While the continuation of *Shikinen Sengū* is characterized by its emphasis on preserving tradition through creativity, its consideration of relics (i.e. things that must be preserved) has been limited to the preservation and exhibition of some materials at the Jingū Chōkokan Museum. Applying this tradition to museums today is not easy, but the responsibilities of museums today go beyond simply preserving artifacts. The 2019 ICOM definition of museums includes the practices of "diversity," "equity," "accessibility," "inclusion," and "sustainability." Museums of the future must consider ways to function as spaces that contribute to the transmission of memories and skills. From this perspective, learning from the idea of "everlasting youth" will likely be a future challenge, at least for Japanese museums.

The second perspective is the concept of *Migawari* ("substitute")[14] as a method of passing on culture while changing its form. This is related to the fact that methods such as copying and reproducing cultural properties and producing architectural models were considered effective in the early stages of the museum system in Japan (late 19th century to early 20th century).[15] The Tokyo Fine Arts School, the predecessor to the Tokyo University of the Arts, had since its foundation undertaken numerous projects to produce and exhibit hand-crafted reproductions of antique artworks, in collaboration with the then Tokyo National Museum. When a work, such as a Buddhist statue, was fragile to begin with and therefore risky to display or move, it was thought that displaying a substitute would be effective for both the preservation and utilization of the cultural asset. However, advances in conservation science and the development of the concept of authenticity have led to a gradual retreat from the exhibition sphere. On the other hand, the Japanese method of copying and reproduction reflects, in a sense, the idea of "everlasting youth". This research, encompassing everything from materials to production techniques, facilitates the transmission of skills that can, in some cases, reconstruct an object as it might have appeared 1,000 years ago, rather than merely creating a superficial imitation.

One example of this is the creation of architectural models, which are scaled-down versions of buildings. This is one way of passing on cultural assets that are difficult to preserve in a different form. Architectural models were also useful when Japan exhibited them at international expositions and were displayed until the early 20th century. This method seems to have become obsolete due to photography and digital technology, but the significance of creating substitutes by hand will likely increase in the future.

The third perspective is the issue of re-enactments and re-creations of contemporary art, such as performing arts and installations. This refers to cases where the artist does not recreate the work themselves, but rather a re-creation can be undertaken on behalf of the artist, even after the artist has passed away. The artist prepares detailed instructions in advance, and the re-creator prepares and installs the necessary items according to those instructions, which can sometimes bring the work back to life even when the

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Fig. 3: Banner ads of the exhibition *Re-Display: Instruction and Protocol*, at The University Art Museum, Tokyo University of the Arts, 2021.

museum no longer has the original components in its collection. This can be seen as one way of passing on a work of art that occurs in the absence of physical objects (fig.3).

Symbolic immortality

As mentioned above, there is a Japanese word for *shizō* (dead storage). Its antonym is *katsuyō*, which means to make good use of or utilize effectively, and has the nuance of something being activated or vitalized, rather than passively used. If the utilization of objects is central to their inheritance in museums, then a connection exists between people's views on life and death and the inheritance of objects in museums. The role of museums as repositories, storing vast numbers of objects with no prospect of use, is symbolically equivalent to that of the caretaker of a cemetery. Furthermore, the shift from "utilization" to "dead storage," which occurs amid changes in cultural values, should be seen as a record of this historical change in value.

The remainder of this paper will use the two keywords "symbolic immortality" and *kuyō* ("memorial service"), which are related to views on life and death, to further consider new methods and the significance of passing on objects in museums.

"Symbolic immortality" is a concept presented in *Six Lives, Six Deaths: Portraits From Modern Japan*[16] which examines Japanese views on life and death through the lens of six prominent modern Japanese figures. The book emphasizes the principle of symbolization when considering the relationship between personal and collective life and death, and defines "symbolic immortality" as the desire of finite individual lives to seek universal and continuous life within a continuous symbolic relationship between the past and the future.[17]

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24548

As a premise for this discussion, one of the authors, the critic, Katō Shūichi, offers the following argument about how Japanese attitudes toward death differ from those of Westerners, from a perspective of comparative culture:

> *For Japanese, the continuity of the group is a given condition that is to be accepted and not a goal that one seeks to achieve. For modern, and especially urban, Westerners, the symbolic continuity of one's personal existence is not a given condition but is consciously recognized as a central goal that must be achieved through personal efforts.*[18]

Katō expands on this point as follows: For example, the idea that "even if I die, my work will remain" is common among Westerners as a form of "symbolic immortality," but in contrast, the idea that "even if I die, my descendants will remain" is deeply rooted among Japanese people. However, since the desire for "symbolic immortality" is weak in Japan to begin with, projecting the desire for immortality or continuity onto entities such as family or work is merely a secondary interest; the Japanese people's primary interest is in the present.[19]

Written half a century ago, Katō's theory of the Japanese people requires re-evaluation in a contemporary context. The current discussion must also consider that among the Japanese people today, especially the younger generation, there is a weaker sense of belonging to a group. When discussing how to pass on traditions to the future, we must not forget that this weakening of belonging will be a challenge for the next generation.

It is also important to establish that the idea of "symbolic immortality," such as "even when I die, my work will remain," is rooted in the general Western view of life and death, particularly that of Christian culture, and the logic of individualism.

In Western modernity, the institution of museums (in the humanities) was created to preserve the things people created after their death. With the continuation of this institution in mind, when considering the future of museums, one thing that must be considered, at least in Japanese museums, is whether it is possible to implement practices based on an Eastern view of life and death. If this is possible, then we should move on to considering the issue of what specific measures should be taken regarding how culture can be passed on.

First, in today's world where the 19th century idea of collecting everything is no longer valid, museums must be aware of the need to transform into institutions that have the will to create the future (i.e., history) that should be created through their collections.

Maruyama Masao's historical theory, which Katō's also discusses, is helpful in this regard.[20] Maruyama distinguished between "history that should be made" and "history that is becoming (history created without human will or intention)." Katō argues that this is similar to the difference in attitudes toward death between Westerners and the Japanese. Maruyama's theory suggests

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that Japanese historical consciousness is based on three concepts: *tsukuru* ("creating"), *umu* ("to give birth"), and *naru* ("becoming", flow of events beyond individual influence). Of these, he points out that "becoming" has become fundamental in historical narratives since the Middle Ages. Put simply, the mythological world of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*, as well as subsequent Buddhist thought, is strongly rooted in the idea of "becoming," which has had a profound influence on Japanese views of history and life and death. This contrasts with the idea of "creating" that is fundamental to Western monotheistic thought (i.e. the idea that all things were created by God).

One of the roles of museums, which originated in the West, is to select what is necessary, even if it is not possible to collect everything, and to take responsibility for the collection that is created as a result. This can truly be called "history that should be made." This responsibility is fundamentally the same for museums in Japan.

Furthermore, one should consider the artifacts that are left behind naturally, that is, to consider the role of museums from the perspective of a "history that is becoming." It is important to note that a related term, the "Laissez-faire principle," can be misleading, as it is easy to misinterpret this as an irresponsible attitude suggesting that outcomes are predetermined and that museum preservation efforts are futile. However, this is not what is argued here. The museum, regardless of its will, will be required to remain mindful of and considerate towards the artifacts left behind by a "history that is becoming." If it is not possible to preserve everything, it is extremely important for museums to be aware of their obligation to do what they can, such as storing a selected portion of existing artifacts, or creating special exhibition opportunities.

In this context, I would like to raise a serious issue regarding the inheritance of possessions in Japan in recent years. In traditional Japanese society, there was an implicit understanding that the role of inheriting possessions was the responsibility of the *ie* ("family"), or the affiliated community to which one belonged. However, in modern society, where the birthrate is declining and the sense of belonging to a group is weakening, the very continuity of the old institution of the "family" is in jeopardy. This inevitably leads to a situation where the future of possessions that should be inherited within that framework is also uncertain.

In light of this contemporary situation, museums are expected to take on a role once held by the "family." They are expected to become collection points for objects that have nowhere to go. However, as we have seen so far, there are few museums equipped to cope with this reality. What will be required of museums of the future will be the practice of cultural inheritance that strikes a balance between "history that should be made" and "history that is becoming."

Additionally, with regard to new methods of inheriting objects in museums, I would like to consider the various aspects of contemporary art that, as mentioned above, cannot be addressed with current systems and facilities.

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24548

According to Kato's aforementioned theory on the Japanese people, the main concern of Japanese artists is the present. Even if an artist expresses a desire for the immortality or continuity of their work to a museum, it is difficult to imagine that a museum could take responsibility for storing and managing objects (including non-physical works) created solely out of a concern for the present. If an artist did not believe that they "should [have] made" something to leave behind, the museum will inevitably have to seriously consider how to pass on their legacy "that is becoming." For example, they could create and preserve symbolic substitutes or records to replace the objects. Geidai Art Museum, which is constantly accepting new forms of expression, recognizes this as a major challenge for the future. When considering what the art museum of the future should be, it becomes clear that its role is not necessarily limited to the preservation of objects.

Finally, we should also consider the fact that artistic expression is itself an act of seeking symbolic immortality. Katō et al. list this as the third mode of "symbolic immortality." "Symbolic immortality" can be achieved through the artist's presence and the influence of their work, and to that extent, artists have participated in this process with a "prophetic function."[21] However, in this case, the term refers to the artist's creative act in general, which is easier to understand in fields such as literature and music, where the artist's work is likely to survive through reproduction, or in other words, fields whose outputs are not typically preserved in museums.

Memorial services: Japanese views of the afterlife

Next, this paper will examine the concept and ritual of *kuyō* ("memorial service") in the Japanese view of life and death, and consider its relationship to the function of museums. Before doing so, it is necessary to clarify Japanese attitudes toward the dead and the afterlife, *anoyo* ("the other world"). However, while Japan has an indigenous view of life and death that dates to ancient mythology, it has also been influenced by Buddhism, as well as Chinese and Indian thought, and mainstream thinking has changed over the years, making it difficult to provide a unified view of the dead and the afterlife. This section provides a brief discussion of the topic as it relates to the "memorial service".

In a 2013 survey of the Japanese people's national character, 40% answered "yes" to the question of whether they believe in "the other world."[22] The term "the other world" generally refers to the world after death, but its interpretation may vary. The inhabitants of the afterlife are the dead, but Japanese people view them as spirits. It is believed that a person's soul inhabits a body from the outside, becoming life, and, even after leaving the body at death, floats through nature. In other words, human life is the fleeting physical state of a soul that comes from nature and returns to it.[23] This differs significantly from the Western view that individual life is bestowed by God.

This indigenous Japanese view of life and death underwent a transformation in the Middle Ages as Buddhism took hold. With the spread of

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Pure Land Buddhism, it was taught that Amida Buddha's original vow could send souls to the Pure Land (paradise), "the other world," after death. Then, during the Edo period, cemeteries and Buddhist altars became commonplace in communities, and rituals to honor the spirits of ancestors became widespread.

It should not be forgotten that this Buddhist approach to human death fostered a Japanese view of impermanence. The view of life and death that permeated Japanese culture was one of impermanence (*mujō*): everything in this world is in a state of flux, and human beings are seen as transient, accepting death as an inevitable part of nature.

In his aforementioned book, Katō points out that the Buddhist view of impermanence has the function of "relativizing human death and mitigating its impact." Katō's explanation that "it is not that individual death comes first and is followed by symbolic immortality being projected onto biological or social groups, but rather that the collective immortality comes first, and then individual death is symbolically relativized" aptly represents the Japanese view of impermanence.[24]

However, the concept of impermanence should not be misinterpreted as a prescription for resignation or indifference toward mortality. It is equally true that greater emphasis has been placed on the act of praying for the repose of the souls of the departed, particularly those who have passed away close to us, our ancestors, or those who died bearing grudges.

This is the act called *kuyō* ("memorial service"). Originally, *kuyō* in Buddhism referred to a Buddhist ritual in which offerings were made to revered objects (physical items and people) such as scriptures or priests, through three methods: actions, words, and the mind. However, today, "*kuyō*" generally refers to the act of praying for the repose of the dead. While this "memorial service" held immediately after death, i.e., a funeral, is a prayer for the repose of the deceased's soul, and the first *Bon* festival is a celebration of welcoming the deceased's spirit, "memorial services" held from the third anniversary onward take on greater significance for the living. Furthermore, "memorial services" for ancestors in general, which have become regular events during the New Year, and the *Bon* festival in July, welcome the spirits of ancestors—that is, reflect on their existence—and thus help to reaffirm the traditions of the "family" and community and maintain order.[25]

On the other hand, "memorial services" also function as rituals to send the souls of objects important to humans to "the other world" when their purpose has ended. Even today, "memorial services" for items such as needles, chopsticks, dolls, insects, and eels are held throughout Japan. There is a deeply rooted culture of offering memorial services to express gratitude for tools used for many years, objects that have outlived their usefulness, and living creatures that humans have had to kill. These are rituals that pay respect to the former existence and function of the object and allow it to transition to a peaceful state. Philosopher Takeshi Umehara has stated, "The souls of tools also go to the afterlife and are reborn as new tools. In order to create new tools, it is necessary to send the souls of old

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tools to the afterlife." [26]

As mentioned above, "memorial services" which serve to pass on to the present the people, objects, and cultures of the past, can be a mechanism for cultural inheritance. The connection between this tradition of memorial services and the function of museums warrants examination.

First, the Buddhist idea of *ekō*, which underlies the "memorial services," and in particular the idea of *kanso ekō* ("returning to life"), in which the dead return to this world to enlighten and save people, is consistent with the museum's basic approach to people and objects. Remembering the dead and temporarily bringing them back to life overlaps with the museum's work of reaffirming the appreciation and value of their associated artists and works through research and exhibitions. Removing items from storage and bringing them back to life in the exhibition room could be considered a "symbolic 'memorial service'" for the collections.[27]

Next, holding exhibitions to mark anniversaries of certain year such as an artist's birth or death is another way museums can ensure the cultural inheritance of people and objects, and can be considered a form of "memorial service". Birth and death anniversaries are divided into ten-year or five-year periods, and exhibitions are planned several years in advance, focusing on these anniversaries. This is done for practical reasons, such as the ease with which local governments can allocate budgets for anniversary events, and they also generate significant publicity.

The holding of anniversary exhibitions, while a one-off event, provides an opportunity for works scattered across various locations to be gathered in one place. Furthermore, through curatorial re-examination, it offers a forum for the recollection and reassessment of artists and their works. By revisiting an artist's presence during significant years marking their birth or death, museums have made substantial contributions to scholarly research on artists. [28]

Thirdly, planning an exhibition themed on traditional culture includes, to a greater or lesser extent, an element of "memorial service". In the case of Buddhist-themed exhibitions of prominent temples or statues, a *hōyō*, a formal memorial service performed by a Buddhist priest, is often held the day before the exhibition, but this applies to all exhibition planning related to history and culture. To give an example of an exhibition I have planned, the 2024 *Yoshiwara Exhibition* (fig.4) [29] had a theme that included the negative history of the red-light district in premodern Edo, but the very act of planning an exhibition that focuses on the people and objects related to it can be seen as a "symbolic 'memorial service'".

The relevance of the Japanese "memorial service" to museum functions lies in its capacity to frame relics not as objects frozen in time from another era, but as entities that continually transform within their own era alongside us, as objects that endure and are therefore worthy of being passed on.

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Fig. 4:
Poster of the *Yoshiwara Exhibition*, The University Art Museum, Tokyo University of the Arts, 2024.

Conclusion

In 19th-century Europe, the existence of museums as symbols of civilized nations was unquestioned. Museums were driven by a straightforward assumption: the accumulation of material goods brings happiness to a country and its people, and increasing knowledge leads to greater prosperity. However, today, as the definition of a museum begins to change, the objects collected there are expected to function not just as objects, but as educational materials for addressing contemporary issues such as promoting the acceptance of different values, diversity, and globalization.

In Japan, the era of rapid economic growth, in which the accumulation of material goods and the growth of museums symbolized people's happiness, ended three decades ago. From the 1960s to the 1980s, when large museums were established all over the country, Japanese society achieved growth through methods that prioritized rapid development. Large museums across the country were positioned as cultural facilities that demonstrated the results of this effort, but today they are being reexamined and continue to search for a new meaning for their existence. As social thinker Saeki Keishi points out, not only Japan but all developed countries around the world are facing various contradictions and difficulties due to the ideologies of growth and nationalism.[30]

This paper does not question whether museums will continue to grow, but rather attempts to examine

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what a museum could be, from the perspective of how it should engage with collected objects, and its approach towards future acquisitions, exhibitions, and exhibition planning. In doing so, it emphasizes a cyclical model of cultural transmission rather than a growth-oriented one.

This paper has shown that the inheritance of Japanese culture is based on the idea of the cycle of life and death, and the idea that the soul repeats this eternally, and it argues that there is much that museums can learn from this. The responsibility of a curator is to discover new value in artists and their works through research, collection, exhibitions, and exhibition planning, thereby promoting a cyclical process in which the significance of objects is re-evaluated. By moving back and forth between the current society and the museum world ("the other world"), visitors themselves become participants in cultural inheritance. This paper concludes by presenting this symbolic model of cultural inheritance.

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Endnotes:

[1] I extend my heartfelt gratitude to Mr. John Naoto Tanaka for his invaluable assistance in improving the quality of the translations.

[2] Oral presentations of this research were given at a seminar entitled "Philosophy of Cultural Heritage Preservation: A Comparison between Japan and Italy" held at the University of Bologna on May 9, 2024, and at the 27th University Museum Council and the 19th Japanese Society of Natural History held at the University of the Ryukyus on June 28, 2024. The research was also mentioned in an interview in the *Chugai Shimbun* (October 9, 2024).

[3] Marinetti 1961, p. 124.

[4] Tanaka 2024, p. 13.

[5] Adorno 1981, p. 173.

[6] Interviews conducted by the author with several curators revealed that in some European museums, the museum labels (nameplates) attached to collections are referred to colloquially as "tombstones" or "epitaphs."

[7] Matsumiya 2003, pp. 10-11.

[8] Museums already registered under the old law can undergo an examination and be newly registered during a five-year transition period. According to the Agency for Cultural Affairs, the number of newly registered museums as of September 6, 2025 is 247. See https://museum.bunka.go.jp/guide/.

[9] In a survey conducted by the Japan Association of Museums in 2019, the findings showed that 33.9% of responding institutions reported their storage space was "more than 90% full," and 23.3% stated they had materials that did not fit into their storage rooms. In addition, 27.2% of the museums had outside storage space, while 31.9% of museums reported that they did not have such space but needed it.

[10] The National Museum of Nature and Science launched a crowdfunding campaign with a goal of 100 million yen under the slogan "Protect Earth's Treasures" to address the critical condition of its storage space in 2023, and eventually raised more than 900 million yen.

[11] At the Tokyo University of the Arts, the issue has been continuously discussed in events ranging from the *Re-Display: Instruction and Protocol* exhibition in 2021 to the 2025 symposium *Re-Display Reproduction: Questions and Pleasures in the Re-presentation of Culture, Art and History* (Tokyo University of the Arts, https://taira.geidai.ac.jp/archives/news/sympo20250524).

[12] Kawai 2013; and Mure 2013, pp. 654-689.

[13] ICOM 2010, p. 41. The book goes on to quote the following definition from UNESCO (UNESCO, 2003):

The "intangible cultural heritage" means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. For the purposes of this Convention, consideration will be given solely to such intangible cultural heritage as is compatible with existing international human rights instruments, as well as with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, and of sustainable development.

[14] The author is grateful to Professor Yukio Lippit of Harvard University for his insights on this matter (personal communication, May 2024).

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15 Shiina 2010.

16 Lifton, Reich, and Katō, 1979. A Japanese version was published earlier (*Japanese Views of Life and Death*, Iwanami Shinsho, 1977), but the two are not necessarily an exact translation of each other.

17 A sense of immortality, then, is not simply a denial of death. Rather it reflects a compelling and universal inner quest for a continuous symbolic relationship between our finite individual lives and what has gone before and what will come after. It is a search for symbolizing continuities, despite the discontinuities of death. See Lifton Reich, Katō, 1979, p. 7.

18 Lifton Reich, Katō, 1979, p. 21.

19 Katō 1999, p. 153.

20 "This contrast is similar to Maruyama's distinction between history as 'history that should be made' (*tsukurubeki rekishi*) and history as a 'history that is becoming' (*nariyuku rekishi*)." Lifton Reich, Katō, 1979, pp. 21-22.

21 "The third mode of symbolic immortality is achieved through creative works and personal impact on others—whether through great works of art, literature, science, or more humble influences. The artist has long been recognized as participating in this mode of immortality through his prophetic function." Lifton Reich, Katō, 1979, pp. 10-11.)

22 Institute of Statistical Mathematics, *Survey on Japanese National Character*, 2013.

23 This has been the explanation given in *Kojiruien-jin-bu, 8, Seimei* (Jin-gu-shi-cho 1914), among other places.

24 Katō 1977, pp. 213-214.

25 "'Memorial services' were also an exquisite way of dealing with the spiritual power of those who died harboring resentment or envy. The ceremonies held as "memorial services" have various aspects, such as rituals, and even today they are often the subject of debate between religion and politics. However, the 'memorial services' discussed in this paper do not take the narrow perspective that ordinary Japanese people have in mind, such as appeasing the souls of or dealing with "those who died with resentment (and the spiritual power that is said to emanate from them." Ikegami 2019, p. 17.

26 Umehara 1993, p. 32.

27 To elaborate on this point, the author believes that recent well-being initiatives in museums should be directed not only towards visitors but also towards the collections themselves.

28 Furuta, 2024.

29 https://museum.geidai.ac.jp/en/exhibit/2024/03/yoshiwara.html

30 Saeki 2018, pp. 17-21.

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赤子渕の赤子

Community-Based Museum and Intangible Cultural Resources: From the Perspective of the Concept of Post-Museum

Hiroya Ichikawa

Keywords:
Ecomuseum; Intangible Culture; Yokai; Landscape; Folklore



ABSTRACT:

This study investigated museum activities that utilized intangible cultural resources. In particular, this study focuses on resident participation in museums as bearers of regional culture. Interpreting the term "participation" literally, users are presumed to engage in activities inside the museum; nevertheless, we also need to consider the museum itself engaging with the community. As a research method, fieldwork, including action research, was conducted in two regions. The first was Tono City in Iwate Prefecture, and the second was Miyoshi City in Tokushima Prefecture. The former has utilized The Legends of Tono, written by Kunio Yanagita, as a tourism resource. The latter utilized the yokai (monstrous beings) folklore, passed down orally through generations, as a local resource. Both are characterized by the positioning of invisible beings as cultural resources; however, the direction of museum activities differs. Through these case studies, two types of practical models for the preservation and utilization of intangible cultures were constructed. First, Tono represents a network-type model that connects various facilities, centered around government-led museums. Second, Miyoshi presents an intangible model that deconstructs a museum's functions and incorporates them into the local community. By focusing on intangible culture as "local knowledge," this study presents issues aimed at the post-museum.

L'articolo analizza attività museali che utilizzano risorse culturali immateriali e si concentra, in particolare, sulla partecipazione dei residenti ai programmi dei musei in quanto portatori della cultura locale. Interpretando il termine "partecipazione" in senso letterale, si tende a presupporre che gli utenti prendano parte ad attività all'interno del museo; tuttavia, è necessario considerare anche il museo stesso come soggetto attivo nel coinvolgimento della comunità. Come metodo di ricerca è stato condotto un lavoro sul campo, comprensivo di ricerca-azione, in due contesti territoriali: la città di Tono, nella prefettura di Iwate, e la città di Miyoshi, nella prefettura di Tokushima. Nel primo caso, Le leggende di Tono, opera di Kunio Yanagita, sono state utilizzate come risorsa turistica; nel secondo, il folklore degli yōkai (esseri mostruosi), trasmesso oralmente di generazione in generazione, è stato valorizzato come risorsa locale. Entrambi i casi sono caratterizzati dal riconoscimento di esseri invisibili come risorse culturali; tuttavia, l'orientamento delle attività museali risulta differente. Attraverso questi studi di caso sono stati elaborati due modelli operativi per la conservazione e la valorizzazione delle culture immateriali. Da un lato, Tono rappresenta un modello di tipo reticolare che collega diverse strutture, con al centro musei promossi dall'amministrazione pubblica. Dall'altro, Miyoshi propone un modello immateriale che decostruisce le funzioni del museo, integrandole all'interno della comunità locale. Ponendo l'attenzione sulla cultura immateriale come forma di "conoscenza locale", questo studio solleva alcune questioni orientate alla prospettiva del post-museo.

Opening Picture:

Fig. 18: A Statue of the Baby of Akago-buchi.

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Hiroya Ichikawa is an associate professor of art at Gunma University. His work focuses specifically on the relationship between art and the community. Since 2011, he has been engaged in community-specific art practices as the director of the art-based project "School After School Club" in collaboration with artists. Expanding on this research interest, he has also been investigating the contemporary representation of yokai culture through engagement with local communities. In 2018, he launched a project called "Kanegasaki Art College," which aimed at the utilization of preserved properties in an important traditional building preservation area in Kanegasaki Town, Iwate Prefecture.

Introduction

This study investigated museum activities that utilize community-based intangible cultural resources. This study specifically focused on the participation of residents in museum activities as bearers of regional culture. The current museum definition at International Council of Museums, held in 2019, states that museums are "participatory and transparent, and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities." Interpreting the term "participation" literally suggests that users engage in activities inside the museum; conversely, we also need to consider the museum's engagement with the community as well. Here, we can find the expanded concept of modernist museums as discussed by Eilean Hooper-Greenhill as the "post-museum."

Hooper-Greenhill presents several points of comparison between the "modernist museum" and the "post-museum." A significant assertion in this study is that "the post-museum will be equally interested in intangible heritage."[1] Although traditional museums have focused on the acquisition, preservation, and exhibition of tangible cultural properties, post-museums address intangible culture and utilize it, hosting a variety of events to communicate with visitors. These events may involve the establishment of community and organizational partnerships.[2]

Several studies investigated the relationship between museums and intangible cultural heritage. As Marilena Alivizatou points out, "drawing on the vision of the 'post-museum,' the concept of intangible heritage will be used to clarify and assess the basic museum functions of collecting, making exhibitions, and working with communities.[3] This "unconventional" relationship reveals the potential to reinvent the practice of museums to include elements of living culture in the fields of collecting and creating exhibitions.[4] The term "living culture" used here could serve as an important point of discussion when considering the new role of museums.

Marta Wróblewska contended that the present museum practices prove "the necessity not only to satisfy the intellectual and emotional needs of contemporary audiences but also to depart from being the cemeteries of arts to correspond with the lively everydayness embodied increasingly within the notion of the intangible heritage."[5] Here, overlapping these two approaches with cultural heritage in museums becomes a possibility. Shimona Bodo has suggested two models. One is the "essentialist" model, which considers heritage as unchangeable and permanent. The other approach is based on a "dialogical paradigm" that views material and immaterial cultural heritage from a processual stance.[6] In this context, Saphinaz-Amal Naguib points out that this dialogical model "entails not merely the protection and transmission of heritage, but also brings forth questioning, renegotiations, alternative interpretations, and considerations of sustainability understood here as an ongoing process of social and cultural learning."[7]

In the background, it is suggested that "museum Studies are currently making a big leap toward social

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studies, especially anthropology or ethnography, adapting the methods of fieldwork and surveys."[8] Marta Wróblewska's use of the term "cemeteries" implies that museums are not merely preserving cultural properties whose value has already been established; rather, museums themselves actively engage with the communities surrounding them in a dynamic manner. Janet Blake emphasizes the importance for cultural institutions such as museums "to rethink their role vis-à-vis not only the heritage they hold and display but also the communities that create it."[9]

Purpose and Scope of this Study

As mentioned above, based on the concept of new types of museums, including the "post-museum," case studies grounded in various countries have been undertaken. Janet Blake focused on the growing interest in "community museums, which include museums of minority and immigrant cultures, and, in the UK, the USA, Latin America, as well as the Caribbean and West Africa, museums addressing the slave trade," as methods developed for museums to address challenges related to intangible cultural heritage.[10]

In Japan, although there is an accumulation of research on intangible culture itself, such as folk performing arts, community-based festivals, annual events, and folk traditions, little prior research connects these to museums, particularly practices such as post-museum initiatives. That said, at the practical level, there are cases where, while engaging with the "living culture" that people across the region have inherited, they are positioned in a way that can be described as post-museum.

Here, we provide an overview of the measures for the protection of intangible cultural heritage in Japan. As a basic legal foundation, *the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties* divides cultural properties into six categories: tangible, intangible, and folk cultural properties, in addition to monuments, cultural landscapes, and traditional building groups. In this category, folk cultural properties are divided into tangible and intangible folk cultural properties. When this law was enacted in 1950, folk cultural properties were positioned as part of the tangible cultural properties of folk materials.

In traditional museums, tangible materials were the focus of collection, and consequently, "intangible culture" has been positioned on the periphery of museum activities. In 1975, an amendment to *the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties* added new categories to folk cultural properties and traditional building groups. This change reflects a growing interest in the local culture, including the initiative to preserve the local community.

However, some local cultures are difficult to designate as cultural properties. One example is the memories or narratives accumulated by residents in each region. This study focuses not only on intangible cultural heritage designated as cultural properties but also on other invisible cultures that fall outside of this scope.

As a case study, this study focused on two areas. The first was Tono City in Iwate Prefecture, and the second was Miyoshi City in Tokushima Prefecture. The former uti-

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lized *The Legends of Tono*, written by Kunio Yanagita, as a regional cultural resource. The latter employed the folklore of *yokai* that has been transmitted orally through generations as a cultural resource. Both are characterized by the positioning of invisible beings as cultural resources; however, the direction of museum activities differs.

The Legends of Tono as Cultural Resources

The Legends of Tono was published in 1910, written by Kunio Yanagita (1875–1962) based on stories narrated by Kizen Sasaki (1886–1933), who was from Tono. It contains stories about "Oshira-sama," a god passed down in households, or "Kappa," a creature that appears near water and plays tricks on people and horses. These were narrated not as imaginary stories but as contemporary events. Therefore, these stories have concrete locations.

Tono is characterized by its basin topography surrounded by mountains. In particular, Mount Hayachine, Mount Rokkoushi, and Mount Ishigami are mentioned in the folktales about the three mountains of Tono.[11] This folklore, which reflects the geographical characteristics of Tono, includes a legend that describes how the Tono Basin was once a lake and stimulates imagination about the origins of the region. In the preface of the book, Yanagita wrote the following:

> *I went across the valley of Tsukumoushi, and from there, Mt. Hayachine, which was off in a thin mist and appeared shaped as a pointed grass hat or like the shape of the Japanese phonetic katakana alphabet letter he.*[12]



Fig. 1: Landscape of Tsuchibuchi district.

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Even today, by visiting Tono, we can find a series of he-shaped mountains in the distance above the rural landscape (Fig. 1). In Tsuchibuchi District, a torii gate that marks the ancient road leading to Mt. Hayachine has become one of the iconic sights of Tono (Fig. 2).

These landscapes were not created specifically for public display but have been nurtured alongside people's daily lives and beliefs. *The Legends of Tono* emerged from an external examination of this previously neglected phenomenon. In fact, for some time after publication, *The Legends of Tono* was not recognized as a local resource.

For example, in a booklet published in 1964 by Tono City documenting the city's 10 years of history, the townscape around the castle, centered around the ruins of Nabekura Castle, was listed as a local tourist attraction; however, "The Legends of Tono" was not mentioned.[13] The city directory published in 1960 stated that in addition to being a castle town as a tourist attraction, it was also the city featured in *The Legends of Tono*, which had been nurtured over a long period of life.[14]

During these six years, a regional plan was promoted to network the entire area as an open-air museum park under the leadership of the administration. This plan formulated in 1968 was called the "*Tonopia* Plan," and as part of this, district centers with the function of social education facilities were established in each former village. The August 29, 1968, edition of the *Iwate Nippo Newspaper* included an article outlining the development policy for Tono, a town based on agriculture and forestry. This article stated that the entire area would be turned into a natural park, where agriculture would be utilized as a tourist resource, and an open-air museum would be established.



Fig. 2:
Torii gate to Mt. Hayachine.

Hiroya Ichikawa
Community-Based Museum and Intangible Cultural Resources: From the Perspective of the Concept of Post-Museum
https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24549

Open-Air Museum, Ecomuseum, and Indigenous Museum

The history of open-air museums in Japan is said to have begun with the "Open-Air Museum of Old Japanese Farmhouses" in Toyonaka City, Osaka Prefecture, in 1956. This facility consisted of relocated folk houses from all over Japan. In 1965, an open-air museum, "Meiji Mura," opened in Inuyama City, Aichi Prefecture, which housed modern architecture constructed during the Meiji period.

Tomoko Ochiai classifies open-air museums into three types: first, the on-site preservation type; second, the relocation and collection type; and third, the restoration and construction type.[15] The above-mentioned "Open-Air Museum of Old Japanese Farmhouses" and "Meiji Mura" can be categorized as the second type. There, buildings or houses are gathered in one place as a type of tangible cultural heritage that is closely related to the collection of materials in modernist museums. Conversely, examples of on-site preservation-type open-air museums include ruins, historic sites, and national parks. In addition to this, "traditional building groups"[16] and "cultural landscapes" under *the Law for Cultural Properties Protection* are also cited as examples.

In this context, the term "ecomuseum" refers to the place being considered as a museum. The term "ecomuseum" originated in France in the 1960s, based on the idea of reaffirming regional culture and rejecting centralization.[17] This scenario also resonated with the renewed interest in local culture and the growing movement to preserve townscapes in Japan throughout the 1960s and 1970s. According to Georges Henri Rivière, "an ecomuseum is an instrument conceived, fashioned, and operated jointly by a public authority and a local population." There, "the public authority's involvement is through the experts, facilities, and resources it provides; the local population's involvement depends on its aspirations, knowledge, and individual approach."[18]

Since 1991, Asahi Town in Yamagata Prefecture, Japan, has advocated for the "eco-museum" as a basic concept for town development, implementing it through collaboration between the local government and residents. Asahi Town, based on the concept of coexistence between nature and humans, has set its town development's core theme as "an enjoyable living environment concept of ecomuseum." The world's first "Air Shrine," dedicated to air, was built in this town in 1990. This can be described as a form of fiction, a system for visualizing invisible air. Thus, the practice of ecomuseums is less about consolidating the knowledge of experts and more about the playful spirit of the local residents. In fact, when planning and implementing the project, particular attention was placed not only on highlighting the "things" themselves but also on placing the spotlight on the "people" involved with them.[19]

A report on *Ecomuseum* published by the Tansei General Research Institute in 1993 noted that certain museums had been operating under similar concepts to the ecomuseum, even before the concept arrived in Japan, and classified them into eight categories. The first example is Asahi Town mentioned above, which was established based on the con-

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cept of an ecomuseum. Second, it involves efforts to advance the idea, and third, areas that are interested in ecomuseums.

All three above-mentioned are examples of attempts to develop them under the name of "ecomuseums"; however, there is also a fourth category of examples that are not named "ecomuseums" but are conceived with a common concept. Fifth, there are onsite conservation and utilization museums that focus on natural heritage, sometimes referred to as natural science open-air museums or field museums. The sixth type is an open-air museum that preserves and utilizes ruins and historical sites in situ. When ruins or historical sites exist independently, they are sometimes called "site museums"; however, if they form a network and have a core museum, they can technically become an ecomuseum. The seventh type includes townscapes and small museum networks and the eighth type focuses on lifelong learning and environmental development.[20]

Ecomuseums can be considered a type of open-air museum. However, although traditional open-air museums fit the framework of modernist museums, ecomuseums can also be interpreted as a type of post-museum. Specifically, in ecomuseums, the focus of museum activities is shifting from "tangible heritage" to "people." Therefore, there are constraints on the type of museum that can be built in a limited area, and people's living spaces may also serve as museums.

In this context, it is necessary to reconsider the position of curators as professional museum staff members. For example, in Asahi Town, every resident can take on the role of a curator. The word "curator" comes from the Latin word curare, which means "to take care of." Christina Kreps returns to the original meaning of the word and points out that if we consider curators as caretakers and guardians of culture, we can see how certain individuals in many societies, such as priests, ritual specialists, shamans, and the elderly, are curators.[21] Here, Kreps terms this role "indigenous curation" and states that they "may possess specialized knowledge on the care and treatment of certain types of objects and are entrusted with keeping these objects safe on behalf of a community, family, or clan."[22]

The "indigenous curators" referred to here are not "curators" as professional museum staff members but rather play a role in protecting cultural artifacts in their respective living spaces. Therefore, there exists no museum in the form of a building; rather, only a private home that can be described as an invisible museum. For example, in Chapter 14 of *The Legends of Tono*, the text discusses *kami* (gods), called *Okunai-sama* and *Oshira-sama*.

> *In every village, there is always one old household that worships the kami (spirit) Okunai-sama. This old family is referred to as daido. The image of the kami is carved from mulberry wood and has a face drawn on it. A hole is punched in the middle of a square piece of cloth, and the cloth is pulled down over the image to create a garment. On the fifteenth*

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> *day of the New Year, immediate neighbors gather in the house to worship this kami.*[23]

This statue of a deity is based on the faith of each community. These are privately owned and therefore not open to the general public. Today, statues of *Okunai-sama* and *Oshira-sama* are sometimes donated or deposited in museums and displayed in the Tono Municipal Museum. Because these were objects of faith as well as exhibits, sacred *sake* liquor was offered inside the display cases (Fig. 3).

Worshipping *Okunai-sama* and *Oshira-sama* in each household can be considered examples of "indigenous curation." Moreover, such "indigenous curation" itself possesses characteristics as an intangible cultural heritage. Kreps refers to Hooper-Greenhill's "post-museum" and points out that "in the 'post-museum,' curatorial authority is shared by community members and other stakeholders because the museum is more engaged with and integrated into the community, contributing to its vitality."[24]

Based on the discussion thus far, a comparative table illustrating the relationship between open-air museums, ecomuseums, and indigenous museums can be constructed (Table 1). Traditional museums are characterized by the collection and exhibition of tangible cultural properties within an indoor space that is essentially isolated from the outside. From the perspective of cultural heritage preservation, this is an inevitable structure. Among the three types of open-air museums mentioned above, the restoration and construction type, along with the relocation and collection type,



Fig. 3: Exhibition of Okunai-sama and Osira-sama at the Tono Municipal Museum.

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is characterized as similar to traditional museums in that they gather tangible cultural heritage assets, including buildings, within a limited area through relocation or restoration. In on-site preservation-type open-air museums, ruins and historic sites, as well as natural parks, are preserved in situ, making the establishment of a network connecting them important. Furthermore, along the same lines as this type of open-air museum, ecomuseums highlight not only tangible culture but also intangible heritage, such as residents' memories. Furthermore, regardless of the presence or absence of a formal museum framework, the practice of indigenous museums within each home or community holds intrinsic value as intangible cultural heritage.

Network-type of museums led by the government

In the above report, Tono was not cited as an example, but ideas that led to an ecomuseum could be found. The illustrated report published in 1979 outlined the "Tono Basin Folk Museum Park Plan." The plan consists of five functions. The first is a natural museum park that focuses on topography and geology. The second is a historical museum park that displays ruins, the origins of the village, and the town's history. Third is a folk museum park that preserves faith, traditions, folk performing arts, etc. Fourth is an agricultural museum park where visitors can experience farming, traditional housing, and daily activities. Fifth is an academic, recreational museum park for studying nature and folklore.

Table 1:

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Modernist museum</td><td>Indoor</td><td>Off-site</td><td>Tangible Heritage</td><td>Traditional museums</td></tr>
<tr><td>Open-air</td><td>Off-site</td><td>Tangible Heritage</td><td>Restoration and construction type open-air museums, relocation and collection type open-air museums</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Post-museum</td><td rowspan="2">Open-air</td><td rowspan="2">On-site</td><td rowspan="2">Tangible Heritage</td><td rowspan="2">On-site preservation type open-air museums (natural science open-air museums, ruins, historic sites)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Open-air</td><td>On-site</td><td>Tangible/Intangible Heritage</td><td>Ecomuseums</td></tr>
<tr><td>Open-air</td><td>On-site</td><td>Intangible Heritage</td><td>Indigenous museums</td></tr>
</table>

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24549

In response, we envisaged the establishment of local museums in each district. The original plan envisaged the construction of a folklore museum in the Tsuchibuchi area, a folk art museum in the Aozasa area, a local performing arts museum in the Kamigo area, a livestock museum in the Tsukumoushi area, an archeological museum in the Matsuzaki area, an agricultural museum in the Ayaori area, and a mountain museum in the Otomo area.[25] The museum park plan in Tono was based on the premise of utilizing the local environment as it is, rather than relocating buildings and other structures from other areas.

The original plan envisioned that each community center would also function as a museum. For example, in 1984, "Densho-en (Folk Tale Park)," a relocation- and collection-type open-air museum, was built adjacent to the Tsuchibuchi district center. A Nanbu Magari-ya house, a traditional architectural style of the region, was relocated to the site. Furthermore, the site also included a garden made up of plants described in *The Legends of Tono* and a memorial hall exhibiting materials related to Kizen Sasaki, who was born in Tsuchibuchi. Here is touted as being primarily an experiential learning facility, with local residents demonstrating sericulture, folk craft making, and folk tales, as well as reenacting annual events for each season to keep the "furusato (hometown)" alive in the present and pass it on to the next generation.[26] In this sense, Densho-en became one of the places that embodied the concept of "Tono Basin Folk Museum Park Plan." However, the realization of a utopia, in which all district centers have museum functions, has not yet been achieved.

Conversely, the Tono Municipal Museum, which covers the entire city area, was established in 1980. This museum, as a specialized folklore institution, not only collects and exhibits tangible cultural assets, such as folk tools and ancient documents, but also records audiovisual materials related to intangible folk culture, such as annual events and folk tales. In 1986, a facility specializing in folktales called "Tono Folk Tale Village" opened, and facilities with museum functions were built in various parts of the city.

The "*Tonopia* Plan" continued to serve as a guideline for regional development and was carried over into the "Tono City Tourism Development Plan" compiled in 1989. In this plan, Tono City was divided into seven zones based on regional characteristics, such as "Castle Town," "Kappa," and "Mountain God." In particular, the "Kappa Zone" includes the Tsuchibuchi district and is positioned as an important tourist area. It has also been proposed that the "Densho-en" located in this area be developed into a "Storytelling Museum."[27]

In 1981, Takamuro Suikouen, a hot spring facility offering overnight stays, was built in the Takamuro area of the Tsuchibuchi district. This was constructed as part of the water purification management center built as part of the city's water supply expansion project, which is a facility that pursues the ideals of the *Tonopia* Plan and is equipped with a solar system that uses solar heat and a hydroelectric power generation system. This was a new development in forming a community

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connected by water, and it was expected to become a place of solidarity, cooperation, and interaction, second only to the civic center around the museum.[28]

Throughout the 1980s, several public facilities were built around the city, and networks were established between them. In 1992, the World Folktale Exposition was held in Tono, in which the previously mentioned "Densho-en" and "Takamuro Suikouen" were also used as satellite venues. Although traditional expositions often focused on "things," this exposition aimed to exhibit the "spirit." According to the report, the achievement of this exposition includes "a local area without regional resources utilizing intangible oral traditions, such as 'folktales,' as resources for a new type of exposition" and "the widespread recognition that 'folktales' are an intangible and valuable heritage common to all humanity."[29]

In 1996, Tono Furusato Village opened as a new open-air museum in Tsukumoushi District. Traditional buildings from the Edo period to the Taisho period that remained in Tono City were relocated to a forest site, which covers an area of over 8 ha, recreating the scenery of a rural mountain village.

Community-specific Heritage Certification

In 2007, the "Tono Heritage Certification" was initiated. This featured a bottom-up system in which residents themselves recommend the "treasures" of their hometown, unlike traditional cultural property preservation administration. The conditions for the recommendation of Tono Heritage are that it "expresses the charm of Tono" and that "it will continue to be protected and utilized by local residents." The contact point for the application was the nearest district center. As mentioned earlier, even the centers without museums play an important role in supporting residents' efforts to preserve and utilize the "heritage." This certification system is not limited to the framework of citizen participation in museums but is based on the continuous activities of the people living there, and it can also be considered an expansion of the concept of museums.

The Tono Heritage Certification Ordinance was enacted in 2007 in Tono City, defining Tono Heritage in four categories. The first is a tangible cultural heritage site that includes buildings, historical sites, monuments, crafts, and archeological materials. Second is an intangible cultural heritage, which includes customs, traditional performing arts, and traditional techniques. Third is a natural heritage site that includes animals, plants, geological minerals, landforms, and natural phenomena. Fourth applies to complex heritage, formed by the integration of multiple tangible and intangible cultural and natural heritages.

As an example of tangible cultural heritage, "Haseki River and *Kappa-buchi* Pool," designated as Tono Heritage No. 22, can be mentioned (Fig. 4). This landscape is related to the 58th chapter of *The Legends of Tono*. A nearby sign explains the story in Japanese and English. The English text is as follows:

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24549



4

Near the Obako Deepwater Pool on the Kogarase River, there is a home called the New House. One day, a child took a horse to cool off in the deep pool and then went off to play. A "Kappa" appeared and tried to pull the horse deeper into the water, but instead the Kappa was pulled out of the water by the horse and dragged off to the stable. The Kappa hid under the horse's feed bucket.[30]

This is a historic site associated with *The Legends of Tono;* however, it is difficult to objectively demonstrate its authenticity, and it is not easily considered a target for general cultural property protection. However, under the Tono Heritage Certification System, this place has become the subject of designation as something that represents the uniqueness of Tono.[31] Nowadays, when visiting *Kappa-buchi*, we can see many tourists trying to catch *kappa* by attaching cucumbers to the ends of their fishing rods. Here, by sharing a kind of fantasy that "*kappa* might exist," a site is created where people can enjoy the water environment itself.

Thus, in Tono, the *kappa* is used to symbolize *The Legends of Tono* beyond the original folklore. At Jouken Temple, which is adjacent to *Kappa-buchi*, there is also a stone statue called a "*Kappa Komainu*," whose head is indented to resemble the plate on a kappa's head (Fig. 5). Additionally, near the "Densho-en," there is a wooden kappa statue named "Anzen Taro" (Fig. 6). This was made in 1984 to protect road safety. As was previously highlighted in the case of the "Air Shrine" in Asahi Town, this can also be considered a created tradition.

Fig. 4:
Kappa-buchi.

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Fig. 5:
Kappa Komainu.

Fig. 6:
Wooden Statue of Kappa (Anzen Taro).

An example of intangible cultural heritage is the "*Aozasa Shishi-Odori* (Deer Dance)," which has been designated as Tono Heritage No. 27. Amid the risk of ancestral local performing arts like *Shishi-Odori* declining, a preservation society consisting of several traditional groups was established in 1964. The *Aozasa Shishi-Odori* was designated as an intangible cultural asset in Tono City. Subsequently, in 1974, it was designated as an intangible cultural property of Iwate Prefecture, and in 1978, it was selected as an intangible folk cultural property for which measures, such as record creation, should be taken based on *the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties*.

In that sense, even if it is not necessarily recognized as a Tono Heritage, it is already protected as a "cultural property." However, in recent years, because of the consolidation and closure of junior high schools, there has been a sense of crisis regarding the training of successors, and a commemorative magazine has been published to record the 50 years since the preservation society was founded as a local cultural heritage site. Thus, the essence of intangible culture lies in the local residents themselves becoming transmitters and passing them on as local pride.[32]

In 2010, marking the 100th anniversary of the publication of *The Legends of Tono*, the Tono Municipal Museum was renovated. During the renovation, efforts were made to deepen visitors' understanding by exhibiting not only original tangible materials, such as folk tools and documents, but also various audio-visual materials and dioramas. For example, at the entrance of the permanent exhibition room, a 3D map showing the topography of Tono has been installed, and by projecting movies onto it, stories such

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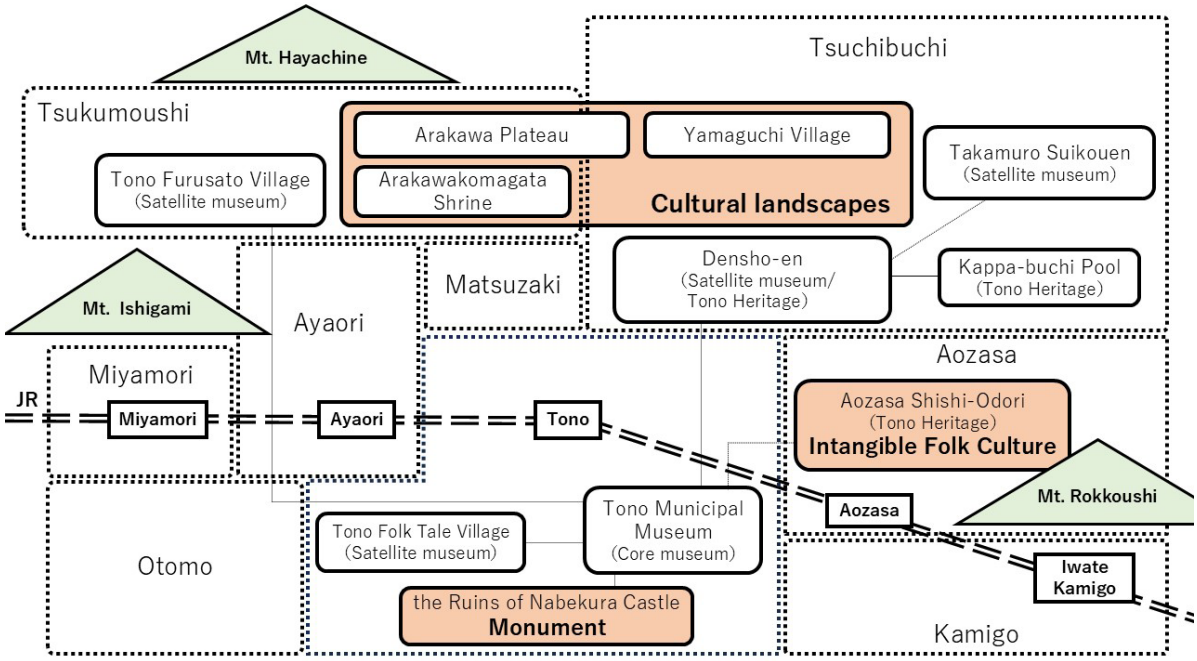


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https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24549



9

Fig. 7: Projection of a 3D map of Tono City.

Fig. 8: A Part of the Dioramas (Deer Dance).

Fig. 9: A network-type museum model of Tono City.

as the Three Mountains of Tono are depicted (Fig. 7). Additionally, the dioramas depict rural landscapes and annual events that change seasonally (Fig. 8).

The renewal was based on the concept of a core museum that would take a fresh look at the region through *The Legends of Tono* and work with local residents to discover the region's unique characteristics and resources, disseminate information, and build a traditional culture.[33] The term "core museum" used here can be interpreted as a concept positioning the story locations scattered throughout the regions as "satellite museums."

In 2010, the "1000 Tono *Kataribe* Project" was launched as part of the centennial celebrations of *The Legends of Tono*. In Tono, a *Kataribe* is a storyteller who recites folktales that have been passed orally. This was once performed within the home; however, these days it is often performed for tourists.

On March 11, 2011, the Great East Japan Earthquake caused significant damage to Tohoku's coastal areas. Located inland, Tono City suffered relatively little damage from the earthquake and became a logistical support base for reconstruction. The formation of this flexible reception system is attributed not just to its geographical location but also to its longstanding status as a tourist destination, making it accessible to people from outside the region.

In Tono, leveraging *The Legends of Tono*, first published in 1910, initiatives have been made to develop the community by focusing on both visible tourist spots and intangible heritage. By constructing government-led facilities throughout the city and connecting them, the entire area functions as an on-site preservation-type open-air museum. Fig. 9 illustrates the network across the entire city.

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Yokai as local cultural resources

In the next case study of Miyoshi City, community activities led by the residents have taken precedence over the museum established by the administration. This area has been known for the scenic beauty of *Oboke/Koboke* over the years and has attracted visitors as a tourist destination. In 2024, this area was certified as a Japan Geopark under the name "Miyoshi Geopark." The landscape of the steep slopes formed by the erosion of the Yoshino River created a historic village and traditional farming practices (Fig. 10).

Despite having a wide range of regional resources spanning from the natural sciences to the humanities and social sciences, there is no comprehensive museum in Miyoshi City. Under such circumstances, "Roadside Station *Oboke*" can be cited as one of the facilities with museum functions in this city. This facility was originally built in 1996 as the tourist information center "Lapis *Oboke*." A part of this building was operated as a "Stone Museum" that exhibited the geology of the surrounding area and minerals from around the world. Initially, directors and curators were assigned; however, by the time the author started fieldwork in 2009, there were no staff specializing in stones. At this point, although it was named "museum," it was merely a tourist center with exhibition functions and was not functioning for research and collection.

However, around 1999, surveys on the local legends of *yokai* carried out by community residents began to progress. This turning point can be attributed to the discovery of the folklore of the *Konakijiji* by a local historian in Tokushima Prefecture. *Konakijiji* is a character that appeared in the manga *GeGeGe no Kitaro* by Shigeru Mizuki (1922–2015). To use this famous *yokai* character as a local resource, a volunteer organization of residents established a stone statue of *Konakijiji*.

yokai folklore was conducted through literature surveys and interviews, which led to the discovery of more than 100 stories. In 2009, a book titled *The Legends of Yokai Village* was published. The contents of this book are based on the research by Shoichi Shimooka, who is from this region. It includes yokai folklore based not only on literature surveys such as local history but also on interviews with nearly 40 local residents. This is a major difference from *The Legends of Tono*, in which Yanagita, as an outsider, is based on stories he heard from Sasaki, who was from Tono.

In the preface to *The Legends of Yokai Village*, Shimooka states that the *yokai* in this region are "essential for coexisting with the harsh nature and created out of a parental instinct to protect life."[34] Some of these legends contain messages intended to warn about dangerous places linked to the landscape. Therefore, in this context, *yokai* culture functions not merely as a fictional story but as a form of local knowledge.

In 2010, part of the "Stone Museum" in a roadside station was renovated, and the "*Yokai* House," which introduces local *yokai* folklore, was opened. Notably, the establishment of this new exhibition facility was largely driven by the local residents.

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24549



10

Fig. 10: *Oboke* View, Yoshino River.

In fact, the figures of *yokai* displayed in the museum were created by the residents.

Currently, no staff members have been designated as "curators" at this museum; instead, local residents have taken on the roles of conducting research and organizing exhibitions. Rather, in the case of *yokai* folklore, it cannot be stored as "tangible material" in museums, and the residents themselves can be positioned as cultural resources.

Ochiai focuses on the role of "roadside stations" as places for disseminating information about local culture and advocates for the concept of a "roadside station museum." She points out that "roadside stations" are often equipped with shops or restaurants that offer local specialties and regional dishes, and by incorporating the function of conveying information about the area's history and culture, they can become well-rounded local museums.[35]

In this context, when positioning "roadside station Oboke" as a "roadside station museum," several characteristics can be identified. In the first place, "roadside station Oboke" was built as a "Stone Museum" and was registered as a "roadside station" as an afterthought in 2008. In 2010, the first floor of the "Stone Museum" was renovated as the "Yokai House." Therefore, with roadside stations being admission-free facilities, the museum part requires an admission fee. Although the museum facility requires an admission fee, it is registered as an admission-free roadside station that provides unique game meat dishes.

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The imaginary road of legends and folklore

In 2008, *the Law on the Promotion of Visits and Stays by Tourists through the Development of Tourism Areas* was enacted, leading to advancements in the development of "tourism areas" across various regions. Under the law, a "tourism area" is defined as "an area consisting of tourist destinations where stay promotion districts exist and which are closely related in terms of nature, history, culture, etc., and which aims to enhance the attractiveness of the tourist destinations through cooperation between these destinations."[36]

The two cities and two towns in the western part of Tokushima Prefecture, including Miyoshi City, were designated as the "Nishi Awa/Mt. Tsurugi and Yoshino River Tourism Area" in 2008, when the system was launched. The Tourism Area Development Plan aims to "create attractive regions for future generations" by connecting the area's rich resources, generating attractions beyond individual ones, and working on creating a highly competitive tourism region that stands out globally. The brand concept "A thousand years, a hidden hamlet" has been established for this purpose.[37] Based on this concept, JR Shikoku began operating a sightseeing train, named *Shikoku 1000 Years Story*, between Tadotsu Station and Oboke Station in 2017.

The commencement of regular sightseeing train operations sparked a project to develop a walkway connecting train stations with roadside stations. This project aims to ensure that pedestrians can follow a safe route and enhance circulation within the area by installing signboards, as the pathway is narrow and the traffic volume along the route is high.





Fig. 11: Guideboard of Doromeki-buchi.

Fig. 12: Wooden statue of *Enko*.

Hiroya Ichikawa
Community-Based Museum and Intangible Cultural Resources: From the Perspective of the Concept of Post-Museum
https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24549

As part of the Nishi Awa Concept Road, an information pamphlet on walking along the road of *yokai* folklore has been published. There are two routes set up there: a walking course and a trekking course. These routes start at *Oboke* Roadside Station. The walking course is a round-trip route between the roadside station and the Stone Statue of *Konakijiji* for approximately 90 min. The trekking course takes about three hours, walking along a steep mountain path, passing through the viewing spot of *Kompira* Shrine on the mountainside, and descending the *Yokai* Road.[38] In the past, there were tours where people walked a trekking course guided by local residents. We were not only given information about *yokai* folklore but also learned about plants that can be found in the mountains, how to walk on rugged mountain paths, local dialects, etc.



Fig. 13:
Costume of *Enko*.

However, these guides are no longer available because of the aging of local guides. This pamphlet introduces storytellers from *Yokai* Village, including residents who have memories of playing with monstrous beings during their childhood. The *yokai* culture in this region has been passed down orally and therefore exists only in people's memories. It is difficult to visually recognize their existence; however, we can expand our imagination by placing ourselves in an environment in which they are said to have appeared. Furthermore, to stimulate our imagination, guide boards and statues of *yokai* have been installed along the *Yokai* Road.

For example, a *yokai* called "*Enko*" is said to have appeared in this area. This is a monstrous being that appears in rivers, similar to the "*Kappa*" mentioned in the Tono, and is said to pull people into a pool when they approach. The place where this has actually appeared is a pool called "*Doromeki-buchi*" located upstream of Fujikawa Valley. As it was not easy for visitors to reach the site, a guideboard and wooden statue were installed in different locations. The board included a photo of the "*Doromeki-buchi*" site (Fig. 11). The statue was created by local residents and blended with the surrounding greenery (Fig. 12). Additionally, a costume of *Enko*, which follows the image of a green Kappa, has also been made by residents (Fig. 13). The appearance of the wooden statues and costumes is not necessarily uniform, and each reflects the handmade individuality of its creator.

Hiroya Ichikawa
Community-Based Museum and Intangible Cultural Resources: From the Perspective of the Concept of Post-Museum
https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24549

Invisible landscape as invisible museum

In 2023, Fujikawa Valley was registered as a monument related to scenic sites. This is a mountain stream located in the mountainous area between the former Kamimyo Village and the former Nishi-u Village, flowing into the Yoshino River, which creates the scenic view of *Oboke*. This stream has folklore about *yokai* associated with dangerous places, such as *Akago-buchi*, *Kuwan-buchi*, *Doromeki-buchi*, and *Kumotori-buchi*. These reflect a reverence for nature and local knowledge for avoiding dangerous locations, and their value as cultural property has been recognized. The Miyoshi City Newsletter mentioned that the residents' steady efforts to preserve the landscape, listen to and record the legends, and use them as topics for revitalizing the region have been highly praised.[39]

Yokai, which have been passed down orally, possess the characteristics of intangible folk cultural properties, but there have been no cases of designating *yokai* themselves as cultural properties. One reason is that *yokai* are both intangible and invisible beings, making it impossible to objectively grasp their existence. In this regard, the registration of places where legends have been spoken of as "scenic spots" is significant from the perspective of expanding the concept of cultural property.

The root cause of this is the human practice of naming places. However, these are not necessarily recorded on maps and are often remembered only through oral traditions. Therefore, when designated as a cultural property, contemporaneous records were maintained to indicate where



each pool corresponds. For example, the image below is a top view of the Kuwan-Buchi pool, which is said to be inhabited by a giant snake that disguised itself as a young lord and seduced women; however, no one would likely recognize this place simply by looking. Even today, it is difficult to approach this place, and we can fully understand why people used to tell children, "Do not look at Kuwan-buchi when passing this path."[40] Just enough to let us know that this place has a specific name is a small sticker attached to the guardrail on the side of the road. Perhaps we can find an extremely marginal form of museum that preserves the historical significance of the location's name (Figs. 14–15).

Furthermore, "monuments" as cultural properties include ruins, such as ancient tombs, castle ruins, and former residences, as well as scenic spots like gardens, gorges, and coastal areas, along with natural monuments such as animals, plants,

Fig. 14:
A small sign for Kuwan-buchi posted on the guardrail.

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24549



14

and geological minerals. In Miyoshi City, as mentioned above, *Oboke* and *Koboke* have already been designated as national natural monuments and scenic spots, and in addition, the Fujikawa valley has also become a registered monument related to a scenic spot.

The "monuments" listed here are all tied to a place and cannot be moved by themselves. Kent C. Ryden points out that "since places are fusions of experience, landscape, and location, they are necessarily bound up with time and memory as well."[41] Memories associated with a place can be updated by accumulating people's experiences and activities. In Yamashiro Town, many of the places where yokai legends have been narrated are dangerous places that cannot be easily approached. Therefore, the relatively easy old road was renovated as the Yokai Road, and a pool along the way was given a new name, "Akago-Buchi" (Figs. 16–17). Nearby is a statue of the "Baby of Akago-Buchi" created by local residents (Fig. 18).

Fig. 15: Kuwan-buchi.

In this way, local residents exhibited several *yokai* statues along the Fujikawa Valley to make the invisible legends visible. What is noteworthy here is that these statues were created by local residents. In the case of *Konakijiji*, the starting point that brought attention to *yokai* in this region, the original legend was told locally; however, the visualized character was drawn by Shigeru Mizuki. In this context, even locally, the image of *Konakijiji* is a reimport of the artwork created outside the region. On the contrary, in the case of local *yokai* that are not yet widely known, the visual image has not yet been solidified; thus, the flexible ideas of the local residents are reflected.

One example of such unique and distinctive *yokai* folklore is *Yamajichi*, which was passed down in the Mizunashi community. Along the Fujikawa Valley, there are wooden statues of *Yamajichi* and a guideboard (Fig. 19).

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24549



16



17 - 18



Fig. 16:
Entrance to the Ancient Trail.

Fig. 17:
Akago-buchi.

Fig. 18:
A Statue of the Baby of Aka-go-buchi.

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24549



Fig. 19:
Wooden statue of *Yamajichi*.

Hiroya Ichikawa
Community-Based Museum and Intangible Cultural Resources: From the Perspective of the Concept of Post-Museum
https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24549

The village where this legend remains is located midway up the mountain, about a 20-minute walk from the place where the guideboard stands. Regarding *Yamajichi*, a bilingual sign in Japanese and English is also installed at the entrance to Fujikawa Valley and states the following:

> *Climbing up from the statue of Yamajichi along the Fujikawadani River, one comes to the village of Mizunashi. Tales speak of a giant that came here and attacked the villagers. This yokai was chased away by a mountain priest, who later lost his life. To this day the villagers that were killed, the mountain priest, and Yamajichi himself are still worshipped there.*

The mountain priest who defeated *Yamajichi* was enshrined at *Hijirigo* Shrine (Fig. 20), and nearby, a mound was also built to commemorate the *Yamajichi*.[42] Furthermore, continuing along the mountain path from the village, there is also a rock cave where *Yamajichi* is said to have been hidden, but today it is difficult to reach it due to landslides. This situation evokes the image of large cliffs that are said to be the origin of the name *Oboke*. As with the previous *Kuwan-buchi*, the closer we approach the site of folklore, the greater the danger, allowing one to experience the mindset of the people who have passed down *yokai* legends as knowledge for survival.

Kent C. Ryden analyzed the reading and consolidation of regional folklore into four layers and categories. First, local lore, especially material folklore, reveals the depth and intricacy of local knowledge about the nature, physical properties, and limitations of the geographical milieu. Second, regional folklore encapsulates and transmits the intimate and otherwise unrecorded history of a place. Third, local lore provides a strong sense of personal and group identity. Finally, and most difficult to describe, regional folklore reflects the emotions that local residents attach to their place and the components of their place, emotions stemming from knowledge of place-based history and identity, and which inevitably influence their perception of their physical surroundings.[43]

This illustrates the stages that progress from observable elements, such as the natural environment, to invisible elements, such as people's memories and emotions. If we apply this to the case of Miyoshi City, the handcrafted yokai figures made by local residents and displayed at the roadside stations can be seen as tangible folk cultural properties, serving as an introduction for visitors to the Yokai Village. Next, by exiting the building and walking along the well-maintained Yokai Road, visitors can experience the environment that has been described and imagine the relationship between the geographical milieu and legends. However, they are not necessarily sites of the traditions themselves; to actually visit them, visitors must walk along unpaved mountain paths and re-experience the emotions of the people of that time. In that sense, we can say that, here, the environment itself has become an invisible museum. Fig. 21 illustrates an invisible museum model of Miyoshi City.

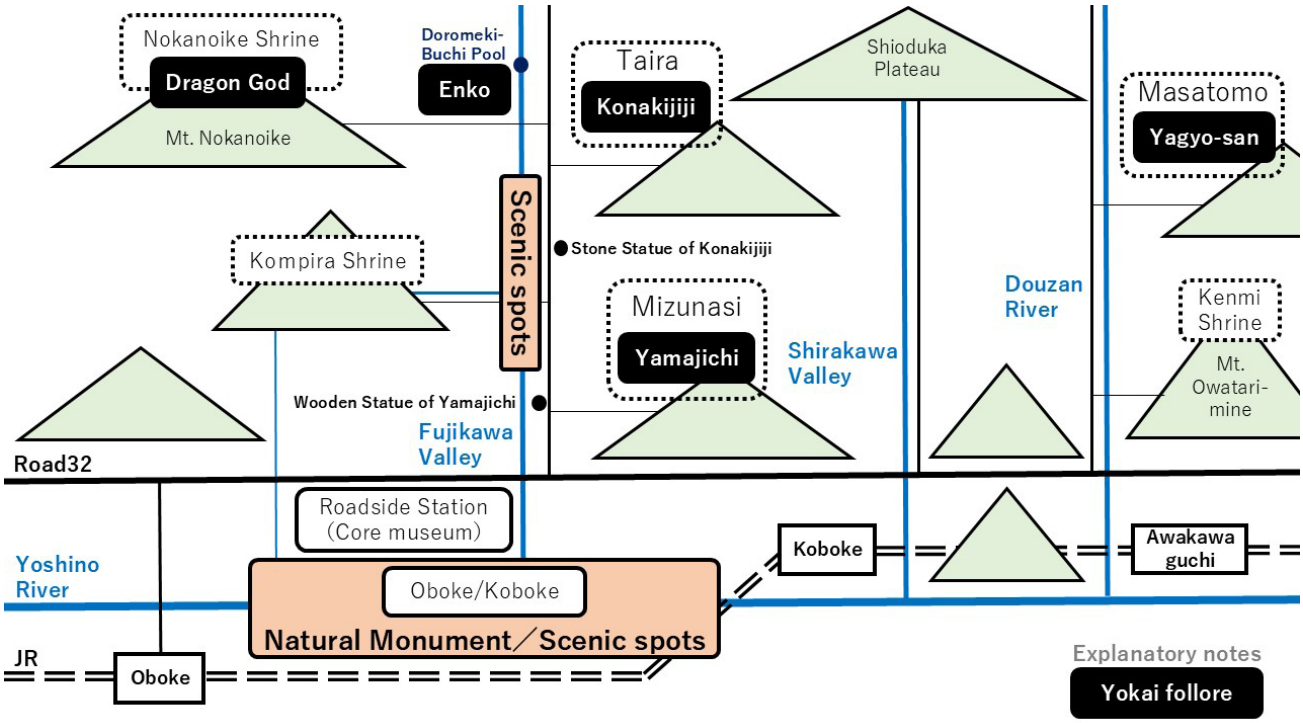
Fig. 20:
Hijirigo Shrine.

Fig. 21:
An invisible museum model of Miyoshi City.

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20



21

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Conclusion

Through case studies in two different regions, this study derived two types of practice models for preserving and utilizing intangible cultural resources.

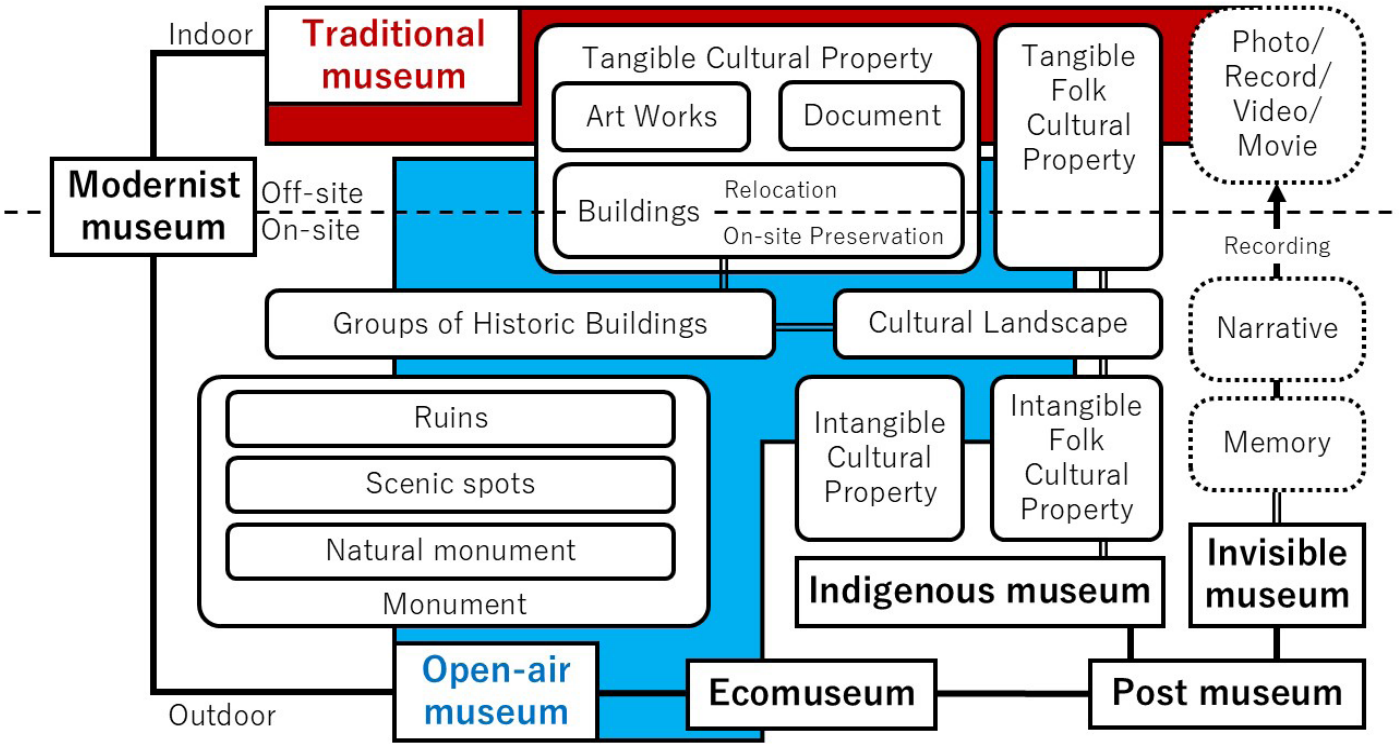
First, as seen in the case of Tono City, it is a network-type museum model that connects various facilities centered around government-led museums. In the case of Tono, the museum and related facilities were built as part of local development under the leadership of the local government, clearly demonstrating the role of a network-type museum. Consequently, the entire area has become like a theme park based on *the Legends of Tono*, making it easy for tourists to get around.

In Tono, the Tono Municipal Museum functions as the core museum, while open-air museums such as Densho-en and Tono Furusato villages function as satellite museums. These facilities collect and exhibit tangible cultural properties and relocate buildings to present information to visitors in an easy-to-understand format, thus fulfilling the role of a modernist museum. Additionally, there are many on-site cultural properties throughout Tono City that are related to *The Legends of Tono*. Many of these cannot be stored in museums and must be preserved on-site. The Tono Heritage Certification System has now established a method of collaboration between the government and residents. Emphasis is placed not only on the objective value as defined by *the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties* but also on the meaning and subjective value to the residents. Therefore, residents' narratives and memories surrounding heritage are given importance, and these activities themselves have the characteristics of intangible heritage. The network-type museum model presented here is a practice that is connected to the ecomuseum in some way.

Second, as seen in the case of Miyoshi City, this is an intangible museum model that deconstructs the functions of the museum and incorporates them into the community. While Tono has many cultural facilities, Miyoshi City does not have a public museum network. This is largely owing to the geographical characteristics of Tono, which is surrounded by mountains and makes it easy to construct buildings in flat basin areas; however, the steep terrain means there is almost no flat land.

In this context, the exhibition facility attached to the roadside station *Oboke* functions as a core museum. Furthermore, the *yokai* objects on display were created by local residents with little involvement from the government. However, the actual sites related to the *yokai* legends are not easily accessible to visitors. Paradoxically, this dangerous environment is characterized by the presence of an invisible *yokai*. Museological practices can be found in the process of valuing *yokai*, which previously existed only in the narratives and memories of local residents, as cultural resources. In this sense, we may be able to discover the model of an intangible museum as a form of post-museum.

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24549



22

Fig. 22: Museum classification map.

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Endnotes:

1 Hooper-Greenhill 2000, p. 152.

2 Hooper-Greenhill 2000, p. 152.

3 Alivizatou 2006, p. 49

4 Alivizatou 2006, pp. 54–55

5 Wróblewska 2019, p. 2409.

6 Bodo 2012, pp. 181–191.

7 Naguib 2013, p. 2179,

8 Wróblewska 2019, p. 2409.

9 Blake 2018, p. 20.

10 Blake 2018, p. 19.

11 The second chapter of *The Legends of Tono* contains the following folktale. "A long time ago there was a female *kami* (god) who came to this plain with her three daughters, and they put up for the night at the location of Izu Gongen Shrine, in present-day Rainai village. Before going to sleep the mother kami told her daughters that she would give the best mountain to the one who had the finest dream. Deep into the night when a lotus flower floated down from heaven and came to rest on the bosom of the eldest sister, the youngest sister, who would wake up now and then, secretly took the flower and placed it on her bosom. Thus, the youngest sister got the best mountain, Mt. Hayachine. Her sisters got Mt. Rokkoushi and Mt. Ishigami." The English translation of *The Legends of Tono* used in this article was based on the following edition: Yanagita [1910] 2008, p. 12.

12 Yanagita [1910] 2008, p. 7.

13 Tono City General Affairs Division 1964, p. 90.

14 Tono City Commerce and Industry Statistics Division 1970, p. 42.

15 Ochiai 2009, p. 134.

16 For example, in the case of Kanegasaki Town, Iwate Prefecture, where the author has continued action research, it was selected as an important Preservation District for traditional building groups in 2001. There, the divisions of samurai residences from the Edo period, the shapes of the streets, hedges, and estate forests remain, and the place itself holds value as a cultural property. This area also has a museum called the Kanegasaki Fortress History Museum, but it primarily functions as a visitor facility serving as an information center, and the actual materials are located outside the museum.

17 Tansei Institute 1993, p. 4.

18 Rivière 1985, p. 182.

19 Asahi Town Reader Planning and Editorial Committee 2010, p. 65

20 Tansei Institute 1993, pp. 95–97.

21 Kreps 2009, p. 195

22 Kreps 2009, p. 195.

23 Yanagita [1910] 2008, p. 19.

24 Kreps 2007, p. 233.

25 Tono City Illustrated News Planning Committee 1979, p. 36.

26 Tono City Tourism Association 1988, pp. 42-43.

27 Tono City, Japan Tourism Association 1989.

28 Tono City Tourism Association 1988, pp. 51–52.

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29 Tono City 1994, p. 24.

30 The English text here is basically based on Ronald A. Morse's translation, but corrections are indicated due to typographical errors.

31 In addition to this "Kappa-buchi," "Taro-buchi Pool," said to be inhabited by a kappa named Taro, is also designated as Tono Heritage No.91.

32 Tono Culture Research Center 2016, p. 4.

33 Tono City Cultural Policy Department 2012, p. 132.

34 Shimooka 2009, Preface.

35 Ochiai 2009, p. 237.

36 Second article in the Law on the Promotion of Visits and Stays by Tourists through the Development of Tourism Area

37 Referred to the PDF of Nishi Awa/Mt. Tsurugi and Yoshino River Tourism Area Maintenance Plan: https://www.mlit.go.jp/kankocho/content/001901239.pdf. See in particular p. 3.

38 Referred to the Pamphlet of *The Road of a Legend and Folklore* by the General Incorporated Association Sora no Sato.

39 Yamashirokko Editorial Committee 2023, p. 1.

40 Shimooka 2009, p. 7.

41 Ryden 1993, p. 39.

42 Shimooka 2009, p. 3.

43 Ryden 1993, pp. 62–66.

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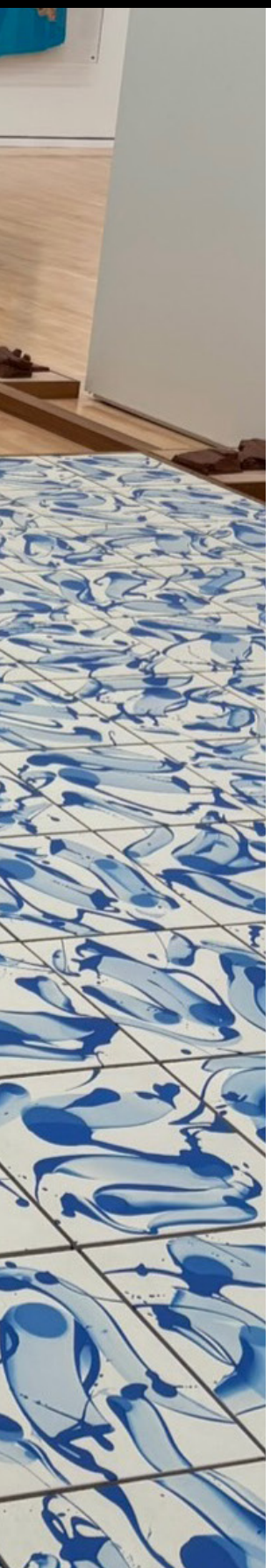
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Text as Narration: Exhibition Texts and Regimes of Art in Contemporary Japan

Misato Shimazu

Keywords:
Exhibition texts; Jacques Rancière; Regimes of art; Japanese art museums



ABSTRACT:

This paper examines exhibition texts in contemporary Japanese museums as narrative devices that organize conditions of viewing. Drawing on Jacques Rancière's distribution of the sensible and his three regimes of art (ethical, representative/poetic, aesthetic), it analyzes how curatorial language positions viewers and structures relations to artworks. Situating exhibition texts within Japan's Meiji-era reception and translation of Western art institutions and the concept of *bijutsu*, it presents five case studies of major exhibitions (2019–2025). The analyses show that exhibition texts function not as neutral supplements but as apparatuses that alternately frame works normatively, stabilize art-historical orders, or open indeterminate spaces of perception, often overlapping within a single exhibition.

L'articolo esamina i testi espositivi nei musei giapponesi contemporanei come dispositivi narrativi che organizzano le condizioni della visione. Facendo riferimento alla teoria di Jacques Rancière della distribuzione del sensibile e ai suoi tre regimi dell'arte (etico, rappresentativo/poetico, estetico), si analizza il modo in cui il linguaggio curatoriale posizioni i visitatori e strutturi le loro relazioni con le opere. Collocando i testi espositivi nel contesto della ricezione e della traduzione, in epoca Meiji, delle istituzioni artistiche occidentali e del concetto di *bijutsu*, l'articolo presenta cinque casi di studio relativi a importanti mostre (2019–2025). Le analisi rilevano che i testi espositivi non funzionano come semplici supplementi neutrali, bensì come dispositivi che, di volta in volta, inquadrano normativamente le opere, stabilizzano gli ordini storico-artistici, oppure aprono spazi indeterminati della percezione, spesso sovrapponendosi all'interno di una stessa mostra.

Opening Picture:

Exhibition room of "Kenjiro Okazaki". (Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo). Photograph by the author.

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I. Introduction – Text as "Narration" in the Exhibition Space

Museums have often been regarded as places that privilege the "direct encounter" between viewers and artworks. Accordingly, the question of whether explanatory texts should accompany exhibitions—whether such texts deepen the viewing experience or instead interfere with it—has long been a subject of debate.[1] This paper examines the role of "exhibition texts," including explanatory panels, wall texts, and captions, in art exhibitions from the perspectives of aesthetics and art theory.

Exhibition texts can function as narrative devices that construct relationships between artworks and viewers and influence the direction and depth of viewing. They are not merely auxiliary explanations or matters of display technique, but provide a framework through which artworks come to appear as "worthy of being seen." Analyzing exhibition texts therefore makes it possible to reconsider the conditions under which viewing experiences are formed within exhibition spaces.

This paper employs the theory of art proposed by the French philosopher Jacques Rancière—particularly his framework of the three regimes of art—as an analytical tool for examining exhibition texts in contemporary Japanese museums. Rancière distinguishes three regimes: the ethical regime of images, the representative or poetic regime, and the aesthetic regime. These concepts indicate different sensible orders through which objects and experiences may come to be recognized as art.

In this paper, these distinctions are used as an analytical framework for reading how exhibition texts position viewers and structure their relationships to artworks. The theoretical discussion is not an end in itself, but is introduced only insofar as it prepares for the analysis of concrete exhibition practices.

The aim of this paper is to analyze exhibition texts in contemporary Japanese museums from this perspective and to clarify what kinds of conceptions of art and forms of viewing they embody. By focusing on exhibition texts, the paper examines how relationships between artworks and viewers are constructed and what kinds of sensible and institutional arrangements are produced in exhibition spaces.

Previous studies of exhibitions and display practices – exemplified by institutional and cultural analyses such as *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* – have examined how curatorial strategies and exhibition frameworks reflect power relations, ideologies, and cultural representations.[2] In addition, with regard to the question of how artworks are described and from what attitude, Georges Didi-Huberman's art-historical studies – most notably *Devant l'image* – are particularly instructive.[3] His analysis of different modes of art-historical writing suggests that the ways in which artworks are described reflect underlying conceptions of what "art" is taken to be, revealing the intellectual and social premises of the writer. Building on these discussions, this paper shifts the analytical focus to a more micro-level element: the exhibition text as it appears within the gallery space.

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By doing so, it addresses exhibition texts as sensorial and linguistic apparatuses that mediate aesthetic experience on site.

The five exhibitions examined in this paper were selected with comparability in mind and include national, public, and private museums as well as an international art festival. They encompass a range of exhibition types, including historical art, modern art, and contemporary art, as well as academic exhibitions, exhibitions involving political controversy, and artist-led exhibitions. Through these case studies, the paper aims to examine from multiple angles how exhibition texts can represent different regimes of art.

This paper is structured as follows. Chapter II outlines Rancière's three regimes of art as a minimal theoretical framework. Chapter III examines the historical formation of exhibition texts in Japan. Chapter IV analyzes individual exhibitions as case studies, and Chapter V presents the conclusion.

II. The Three Regimes of Art and the Sensible Order – The Framework of Rancière's Theory

This chapter does not aim to reexamine Jacques Rancière's aesthetic theory in its entirety. Its purpose is instead to clarify a minimal theoretical framework necessary for the analysis of exhibition texts in the following chapters. Accordingly, rather than providing a comprehensive overview of Rancière's arguments, the discussion below is limited to those concepts that are particularly useful for examining the relationship between texts and viewing experience in exhibition spaces.

Rancière's distinction among the three regimes of art—the ethical regime of images, the poetic or representative regime, and the aesthetic regime—offers a framework for understanding how artworks are rendered visible and how certain objects or experiences come to be perceived as "art." In this chapter, these regimes are employed as analytical tools for examining how exhibition texts assign positions to viewers and structure their relationships to artworks.

II.1. The Ethical Regime – The Moral Function of Images

In the "ethical regime of images" (*régime éthique des images*), art does not yet exist as an autonomous domain.[4] Images are understood in terms of their effects on individual and collective conduct, and their value is assessed according to their social, moral, or educational consequences. Rancière identifies Plato's suspicion toward poetry and mimetic images—on the grounds that they might disrupt the moral order of the city—as a paradigmatic example of this regime.

Within the ethical regime, images are evaluated by both the truth they convey and the uses to which they are put. For instance, poetic images may be judged according to how they educate children or citizens and how they are incorporated into the distribution of social roles within the city-state. In this sense, images are inseparable from judgments concerning their origin, purpose, and effects.

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From this perspective, exhibition texts function as normative discourse. They assign moral, social, or educational meanings to artworks and guide viewers toward specific interpretations. In the ethical regime, exhibition texts do not simply accompany works but actively shape the viewer's attitude and understanding by situating artworks within a framework of ethical evaluation.

II.2. The Representative (Poetic) Regime – The Order and Hierarchy of Mimesis

The "representative" or "poetic" regime (*régime représentatif ou poétique*), which Rancière traces back to Aristotelian theories of mimesis, was consolidated during the classical age.[5] In this regime, the arts are distinguished from other forms of activity as systems of techniques organized around imitation (*mimesis*) and production (*poiesis*). Within this system, artworks are further ordered according to hierarchies of genre, subject matter, and style.

These internal hierarchies—such as the distinction between elevated historical subjects and everyday themes—correspond analogically to social and political hierarchies, and thus tend to reaffirm existing forms of domination. Art is organized according to rules that prescribe what may be represented, how it should be represented, and for whom.

Within this regime, exhibition texts appear as discourses that situate artworks within an art-historical order. To place a work within a historical or stylistic context is itself a political operation in Rancière's sense, insofar as it produces specific relations of visibility and invisibility. Explanatory texts that emphasize authorship, date, school, or stylistic classification genealogize artworks and assign viewers a "proper" position from which to see. Academic and ostensibly objective descriptions commonly used in museum exhibitions belong to this representative regime. Here, exhibition texts fix meaning and reproduce hierarchical order within the exhibition space.

II.3. The Aesthetic Regime – The Emergence of Sensory Equality and Freedom

According to Rancière, the "aesthetic regime of art" (*régime esthétique de l'art*), which emerges in the late eighteenth century, characterizes modern art in opposition to the representative regime.[6] With the rise of aesthetics as a discourse, the plurality of the beaux-arts is replaced by the singular concept of art (*l'art*). In this regime, art is no longer identified by the nobility of its subject matter or the correctness of imitation, but by its belonging to a specific sensible order.

In the aesthetic regime, the sensible is detached from ordinary functional relations and is instead associated with a suspension or displacement of habitual modes of perception. Artistic experience is constituted at the intersection between the disquiet or indeterminacy produced by the work and the free and equal sensibility of the viewer. Art is thus defined not by rules of representation, but by a reconfiguration of sensible experience.

This structure is exemplified by Friedrich Schiller's concept of the "aesthetic state," which Rancière re-

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peatedly invokes as a key reference for understanding the aesthetic regime.[7] In *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795), Schiller describes aesthetic experience as a suspension of determination, a state of "free play".[8]

Referring to this formulation, Rancière writes that the same statue may or may not be art—or may be art differently—depending on the regime of identification through which it is apprehended.[9] In the aesthetic regime, the work is identified as art not by a difference in manner of making, but by a difference in manner of being.

In this sense, Schiller's aesthetic education provides an important conceptual background for Rancière's account of the aesthetic regime as a sensible configuration that anticipates freedom and equality.

In the context of exhibition texts, the aesthetic regime appears when language does not guide interpretation or fix meaning, but instead opens a space for perception and thought. Words may be restrained or presented in fragmentary, poetic form, functioning not as explanations but as prompts that activate the viewer's sensibility.

II.4. Correspondence Between Regimes of Art and Exhibition Texts

On the basis of this framework, exhibition texts can be understood as assuming different functions corresponding to each regime of art:

Ethical regime of images: normative or educational narration (e.g., the presentation of moral or social values)

Representative regime of the arts: scholarly and hierarchical narration (e.g., the fixation of art-historical contexts)

Aesthetic regime of art: poetic or restrained narration (e.g., fragmentary texts that suspend meaning)

Seen in this way, exhibition texts are not merely explanations attached to artworks, but sites of narration that represent regimes of art. In actual exhibition spaces, these regimes do not necessarily appear in pure or isolated form. Rather, exhibition texts may combine elements from multiple regimes, giving rise to overlaps or tensions and potentially affecting the viewer's position.

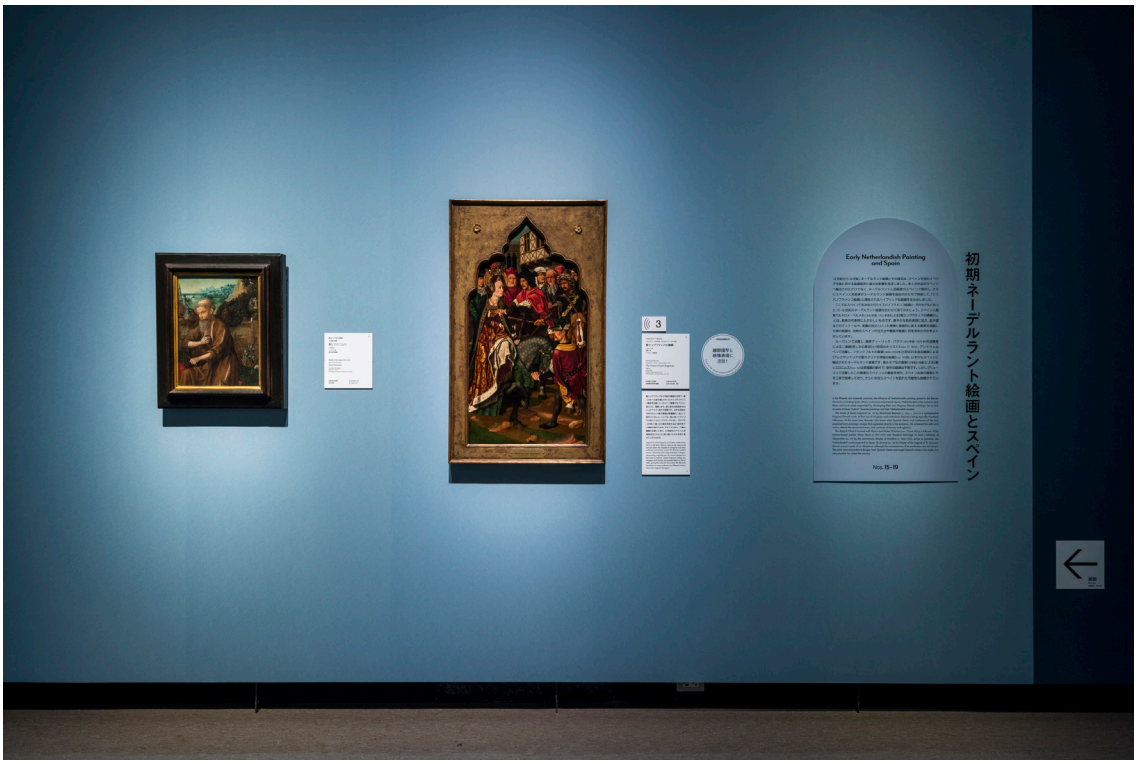
Based on this theoretical framework, the following chapter examines the historical formation of exhibition texts in Japan and considers how translation has shaped their distinctive characteristics.

III. The Translational Character of Exhibition Texts in Japan

This chapter applies the theoretical framework outlined in the previous chapter to the historical formation of exhibition texts in Japan. In particular, it examines how exhibition texts in Japanese museums have configured the relationship between artworks and viewers through the process of receiving Western modern art institutions.

The specificity of exhibition texts in Japan is closely connected to the process by which the Western concept of "art" was introduced. In other words, the institutions of art and museums in Japan took shape during the Meiji period through the reception and translation of Western systems.

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Here, "translation" does not refer simply to linguistic substitution or institutional imitation. Rather, it denotes a cultural practice that mediates between different sensible orders. Exhibition spaces can therefore be understood as sites where institutions, language, and sensibility intersect. Words placed within exhibition spaces visualize the friction between the cultural contexts to which artworks belong and the frameworks through which viewers encounter them. In early Meiji exhibitions, for example, there were cases in which texts explicitly instructed viewers how to look at displayed objects.[10] Exhibition texts thus functioned as sites of sensory negotiation shaped through translation.

The Japanese term *bijutsu* (美術, "art") was introduced as a translation of the German terms *Kunstgewerbe*, *Bildende Kunst* during the process of classifying exhibits for Japan's participation in the Vienna World Exposition of 1873.[11] This does not imply that artistic practices or cultures of appreciation were absent in premodern Japan.[12] Rather, *bijutsu* emerged through an adjustment between institutional distinctions based on Western academism—particularly the separation between fine art and craft—and existing Japanese conceptions of artistic production and appreciation. Building on Kitazawa's historical analysis, this paper understands *bijutsu* itself as having emerged through a process that can be described as cultural translation.

Exhibition texts were likewise formed upon this translated institutional foundation.

Even prior to modernity, forms of textual mediation comparable to exhibition texts existed in Japanese viewing culture. One such example is *gasan* (画讃), inscriptions written directly on paintings to praise or comment on the work. In many

Fig.1:
Exhibition panel for *"From Where Do We View Western Painting? — From the Renaissance to Impressionism: The San Diego Museum of Art vs. The National Museum of Western Art"*, *"Early Netherlandish Painting and Spain"*.
Image © Norihiro Ueno. Courtesy of the National Museum of Western Art.

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cases, these inscriptions were not authored solely by the painter but were added by multiple individuals, opening a dialogic mode of viewing through text itself. Against the background of learned culture at the time, *gasan* constituted a space distinct from both the representative regime and the aesthetic regime as theorized by Rancière.

Following Japan's participation in the Vienna Exposition, however, text and image gradually became separated.[13] From the Meiji period onward, exhibition texts were fundamentally organized in accordance with Western art institutions. Photographs of early Meiji exhibition halls suggest that exhibition texts were limited to minimal information.[14] In this sense, viewers were required to engage in a relatively self-directed mode of viewing, less mediated by textual information. Over time, however, viewers increasingly came to be positioned as spectators guided by external texts.

In recent years, with the spread of dialogic viewing practices and participatory exhibitions, exhibition texts have shifted toward modes of narration that appear to grant viewers a greater degree of agency. Nevertheless, insofar as these texts maintain an objective stance toward artworks, their basic structure remains continuous with the translated exhibition culture established during the Meiji period.

In sum, the specificity of exhibition texts in Japan lies in the fact that they are themselves a translated cultural form. The textual configuration through which artworks and viewers were brought into relation was introduced together with institutional frameworks in the Meiji period and can be said to have remained, in its basic structure, largely unchanged to the present.

IV. Case Studies: Exhibition Narratives and Regimes of Art

This chapter examines exhibition texts in five exhibitions held in contemporary Japan, using Jacques Rancière's three regimes of art—the ethical, the representative, and the aesthetic—as analytical reference points. Each of the exhibitions analyzed here was organized on a relatively large scale and attracted a broad public audience, making them suitable for comparative analysis.

The exhibitions selected are: *Where Do We Look in Western Painting*? (2025) at the National Museum of Western Art; *After "Freedom of Expression?"* (2019) at the Aichi Triennale; *Van Gogh Impact* (2025) at the Pola Museum of Art; *Kenjiro Okazaki: Jikon Jigo* (2025) at the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo; and *Opening Documents, Weaving Memories* (2025), a collection-based exhibition at the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo.

By comparing how exhibition texts are positioned within each display and how they guide or suspend the viewer's gaze, this chapter clarifies how exhibition texts give form to particular regimes of art. Rather than treating exhibition texts as neutral explanations, the analysis focuses on how their narrative structures participate in organizing the relationship between artworks and viewers within the exhibition space.

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IV.1. National Museum of Western Art, *Where Do We Look in Western Painting?* – Scholarly Narration in the Representative Regime

Held at the National Museum of Western Art, *Where Do We Look in Western Painting? — From the Renaissance to Impressionism: The San Diego Museum of Art vs. The National Museum of Western Art* (2025) exemplifies the representative regime in that it foregrounds an academic mode of narration.[15] Drawing on works from both collections, the exhibition sought to present historically grounded perspectives on Western painting and to outline the development of art history. The galleries were organized by period and region, and each section was introduced by large explanatory panels placed at the entrances (fig. 1).

What is notable in this exhibition is that the texts consistently functioned to situate artworks within an established art-historical order. Standing before a work, the viewer was already instructed by the text in how to look, and that act of looking was framed within the bounds of historical knowledge. In Rancière's representative regime, art is systematized according to the logic of mimesis and poiesis, and works are positioned within hierarchies that correspond analogically to social and political orders. The exhibition texts extended this logic: meaning was stabilized through references to technique, chronology, and stylistic development, and the viewer's sensible experience was structured as a process of learning the "proper" way to see.

In this sense, the texts operated as mechanisms that managed the viewer's gaze and redistributed it within an institutional framework. The explanatory panels did not merely supplement the artworks but actively organized their visibility, reproducing the representative regime's emphasis on order, classification, and historical continuity. The exhibition thus provides a clear example of scholarly narration functioning within the representative regime.

At the same time, however, the exhibition did not simply reproduce academic art history in a closed manner. Throughout the galleries, the texts repeatedly posed questions concerning "where" and "how" one looks at Western painting (fig. 2).

By explicitly addressing the viewer's standpoint, the exhibition subtly encouraged reflection on the act of viewing itself. Within the representative order, this reflexive gesture introduced an element associated with the aesthetic regime: an awareness that one's position as a viewer is not fixed but could be otherwise.

The texts therefore sustained the historical and scholarly framework while simultaneously opening a space for critical self-reflection. Rather than overturning the representative regime, they operated within it while exposing its conditions. In this way, the exhibition texts functioned not only as instruments of art-historical instruction but also as sites where the limits and presuppositions of that instruction became perceptible.

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Fig.2: Exhibition panel for *"From Where Do We View Western Painting? — From the Renaissance to Impressionism: The San Diego Museum of Art vs. The National Museum of Western Art", "Why Are These Painting Not Square?"*. Image © Norihiro Ueno. Courtesy of the National Museum of Western Art.

IV.2. Aichi Triennale, *After "Freedom of Expression?"* — The Ethical Regime and its Fissures

The exhibition *After "Freedom of Expression?"* (2019), presented within the framework of the Aichi Triennale, foregrounded the ethical dimensions of exhibition texts by situating artworks within explicit social and political controversies.[16] The exhibition addressed issues of censorship, historical memory, and freedom of expression, and in doing so made the normative function of exhibition texts particularly visible.

The works included in this exhibition were ones whose display had previously been suspended or canceled due to censorship. The exhibition texts did not primarily function to situate the works within an art-historical genealogy. Rather, they functioned as mediating devices that framed the works in relation to social values, public responsibility, and institutional accountability. Wall texts and explanatory panels clarified the circumstances surrounding the suspension of the display, explained the positions of the organizers, and outlined the ethical stakes involved. In this sense, the texts operated within the ethical regime of images, where the value of images is assessed according to their effects on collective conduct and social order (fig. 3).

At the same time, the exhibition space also revealed tensions between ethical narration and aesthetic experience. While the texts sought to provide contextual explanation and moral justification, they also risked constraining the viewer's engagement by predefining the terms under which the works were to be understood. The viewer was positioned less as a free interpreter of artworks than as a subject invited to recognize the legitimacy of a particular ethical framework.

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However, this ethical framing did not entirely suppress aesthetic ambiguity. In several cases, the coexistence of strongly directive texts and materially heterogeneous works generated moments of friction. These moments exposed the limits of ethical narration and suggested the possibility of slippage toward the aesthetic regime, where meaning is not fully determined in advance. The exhibition thus made perceptible the instability of ethical discourse when confronted with the irreducibility of sensory experience.

In this respect, *After "Freedom of Expression?"* demonstrates how exhibition texts can become sites of conflict between regimes of art. While predominantly structured by ethical narration, the exhibition also revealed how such narration is continually challenged by the sensorial presence of artworks and by the diversity of viewers' responses. The exhibition space functioned not as a harmonious field of consensus but as a place where the ethical and aesthetic dimensions of art remain in unresolved tension.

IV.3. Pola Museum of Art, *Van Gogh Impact* – Art-Historical Narration and Structures of Reception

This section examines *Van Gogh Impact: The Genesis of Passion* (2025), held at the Pola Museum of Art, in order to analyze how exhibition texts mediate historical contexts and thereby configure the relationship between artworks and viewers.[17] Rather than simply presenting the life and works of Vincent van Gogh, the exhibition focused on how the image of Van Gogh has been formed and received, visualizing his reception history through a combination of artworks and documentary materials.

Fig.3: Explanatory panel displayed at the entrance of the exhibition room for *Aichi Triennale: "After 'Freedom of Expression?'"*, titled "New Developments Concerning Censorship." Photograph by the author.

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In particular, the section addressing the prewar "Van Gogh boom" in Japan presented quotations from artists and critics, including figures associated with the *Shirakaba* group. Through these texts and archival materials, the exhibition showed how Van Gogh's life and personality came to be interpreted as symbols of individuality and passion within specific historical and cultural contexts.

In this configuration, exhibition texts did not mythologize Van Gogh but presented him as an artist whose significance had been produced through historically situated discourses. Viewers were positioned not only as subjects who directly encounter artworks, but also as subjects who retrace the narratives through which the image of Van Gogh had been constructed. By situating works within art-historical and cultural-historical frameworks, the explanatory texts organized viewing as a process of contextual understanding.

At the same time, the exhibition incorporated a different mode of language. In addition to explanatory panels and captions, Van Gogh's own words were displayed in large stenciled lettering on the gallery walls. These wall texts emphasized visual aspects such as scale and placement, presenting language not primarily as information to be read, but as an element of spatial composition (fig. 4).

Perceived fragmentarily through viewers' bodily movement and shifting lines of sight, these texts offered an experience distinct from that of explanatory reading. While the panels guided historical understanding, the wall texts evoked traces of Van Gogh's thoughts and emotions, functioning less to fix meaning than to prompt sensory and imaginative engagement.

Fig.4: Words of Van Gogh inscribed on the exhibition wall. (Pola Museum of Art) Photograph by the author.

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Through the juxtaposition of explanatory texts and sensorial language, the exhibition structured viewing experience in a dual manner. Viewers were organized both as subjects who interpret artworks through historical narratives and as sensorial subjects encountering fragments of language whose meanings were not fully determined. This configuration allowed viewers to move between contextual understanding and immediate perception.

Furthermore, works by contemporary artists engaging with Van Gogh reinforced this structure. Van Gogh appeared not as a fixed figure, but as an image continually reconfigured through acts of quotation and reinterpretation. In this sense, the exhibition texts operated within the representative regime by organizing reception history, while simultaneously introducing a degree of indeterminacy associated with the aesthetic regime. Rather than determining meaning in a univocal way, the texts functioned as devices that drew attention to the narrative conditions through which understanding itself is formed.

IV.4. Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, Kenjiro Okazaki: 而今而後 *Time Unfolding Here - Poetic Captions in the Aesthetic Regime*

This section examines *Kenjiro Okazaki:* 而今而後 *(*Jikon Jigo "Hereafter"*) Time Unfolding Here* (2025), held at the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, focusing on how exhibition texts intervene in viewers' sensorial experience and orient processes of meaning formation.[18] Active across painting, sculpture, architecture, criticism, and design, Okazaki's practice is characterized by the intersection of philosophical reflection and perceptual experience, a quality that was reflected in the exhibition's textual strategies.

Notably, the captions in this exhibition were written by the artist himself. As a result, while explanatory captions remained present, the exhibition texts exceeded the conventional explanatory function typically associated with museum captions and instead participated in the formation of a poetic field that depended on the viewer's engagement. In several cases, abstract paintings were accompanied by unusually long titles composed as narrative fragments.[19] These texts incorporated descriptive imagery and temporal shifts, unfolding like prose poems rather than offering information directly related to the visual properties of the works.

Encountering these texts, viewers were drawn into a narrative illusion without being instructed how to relate the text to the artwork. As seen in the example above, Okazaki's titles themselves operate as language that actively invites such interpretive engagement. Captions neither explained the works nor stabilized interpretation; in some cases, their placement—deliberately offset from the viewer's primary line of sight—introduced a slight disjunction that prompted viewers to discover the resonance between text and image on their own terms (fig. 5).

In this configuration, exhibition texts functioned not to fix meaning but to invite interpretive movement, encouraging viewers to negotiate the relation between text and image without prescribed resolution.

Through these strategies, the exhibition texts departed from the tra-

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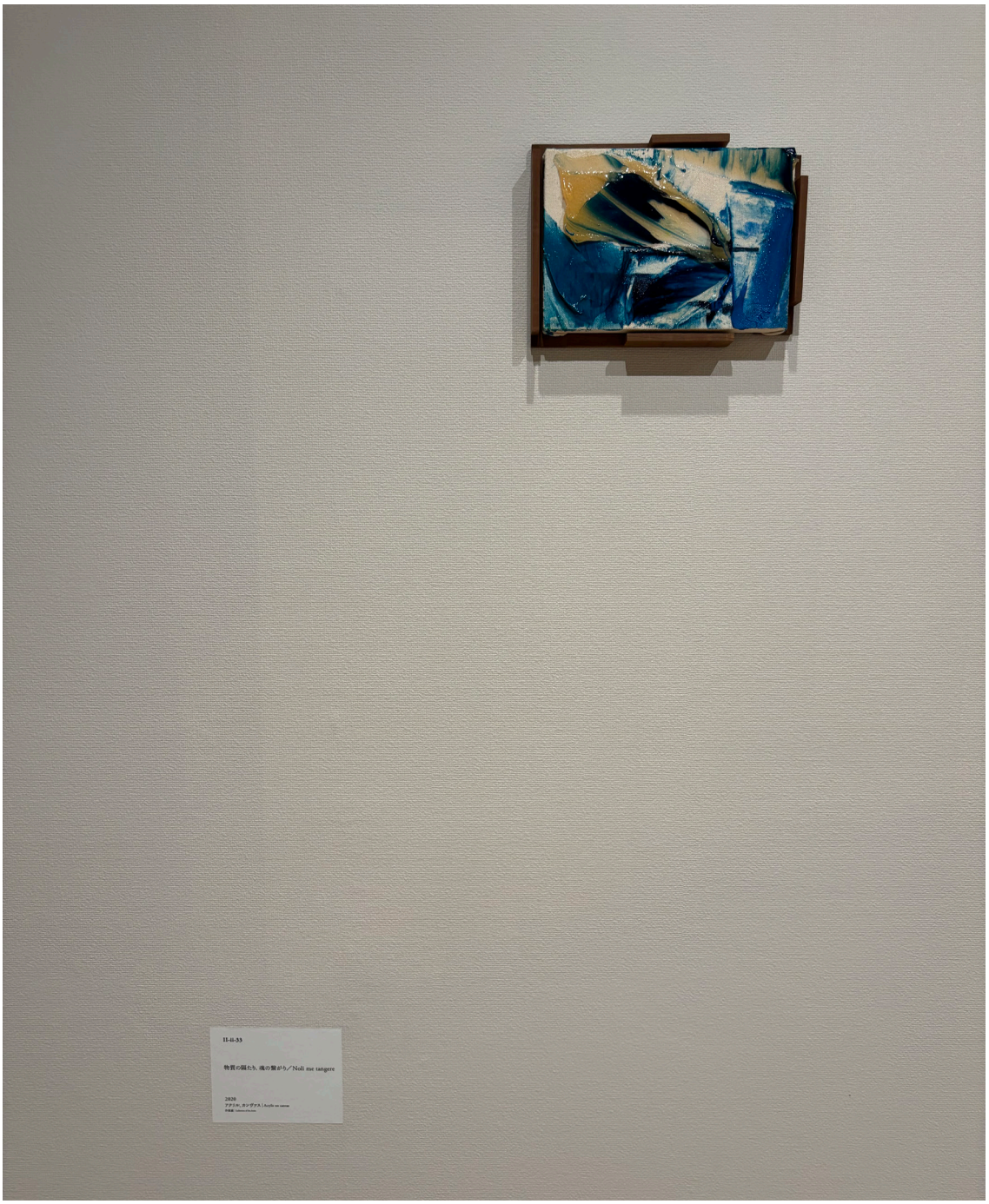


Fig. 5: Exhibition room of "*Kenjiro Okazaki*". (Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo) A small caption is placed at the lower left of the artwork. Photograph by the author.

ditional museum functions of education and explanation, stimulating viewers' thought and sensibility through uncertainty and temporal suspension. Rather than organizing viewing through predefined knowledge, they oriented experience without determining it, allowing attention to oscillate between language and visual form.

In this sense, the texts functioned not as authoritative commentary but as catalysts for interpretation, structuring viewing as an open-ended process. Viewers were thus positioned not as "stultified" beings in need of instruction, but as "emancipated spectators" invited to interpret actively for themselves.[20]

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IV.5. National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, *Opening Documents, Weaving Memories* – Overlapping Regimes

This section examines *Opening Documents, Weaving Memories: A Special Exhibition Featuring Works from the Museum Collection* (2025), held at the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, focusing on how exhibition texts situate artworks and structure the relationship demanded of viewers. The exhibition reconsidered the relationship between Japanese society and art from the prewar through the postwar period through the perspectives of "documents" and "memories."[21] By juxtaposing paintings, photographs, films, and documentary materials, it articulated a position that understands artworks not as autonomous expressions but as media that mediate historically situated gazes and values—a stance made explicit by an opening wall text stating that paintings themselves function as media.

A representative example appears in the captions accompanying a landscape painting of Manchuria from the 1930s. The work was positioned within an art-historical genealogy through references to Millet, while simultaneously being reread as an image that rendered Japan's continental expansion visible. The exhibition texts thus relativized a purely aesthetic mode of viewing and indicated the work's entanglement with contemporary social and political desires, thereby allowing the image to appear as both an art-historical object and a record of ideology.

This operation continued in the display of Ichiro Fukuzawa's *Cow* (1936), where the accompanying text proposed a reading that foregrounded the discrepancy between colonial ideals and historical realities. Here, exhibition texts shifted viewing away from a self-contained aesthetic experience toward a narration that placed the viewer's ethical position in question.

A similar structure can be observed in the exhibition's engagement with war record paintings. Exhibition texts situated these works within Japanese art history while also rendering visible the social functions they performed under the wartime regime. For example, *Night Attack on Tulagi* (1943) was linked through caption text to representations of



Fig. 6:
Exhibition room of "*Opening Documents, Weaving Memories*" (The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo).
A copy of a 1943 *Asahi Shimbun* article introducing Tsuguharu Fujita's *The Battle of Attu* is posted on the wall.
Photograph by the author.

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fire in the twelfth-century *Ban Dainagon Emaki*, requiring viewers to read the image simultaneously as expression and record. In another instance, near the wall where *Gyokusai at Attu Island* (1943) was displayed, copies of contemporary newspaper articles were posted, making visible the divergence between the work's reception at the time of its exhibition and contemporary ways of viewing war paintings (fig. 6).

Through these configurations, the exhibition texts employed narration grounded in the representative regime while opening viewers toward an understanding of artworks as images situated within the ethical regime of their time. The exhibition space thus made visible the inseparability of aesthetic judgment and ethical questioning concerning the social effects of images. Exhibition texts articulated tensions between reading records, tracing memory, and aesthetic viewing, repositioning the viewer as a subject who participates in the narrative by reading images.

Across these five case studies, exhibition texts have been shown to function not as auxiliary information but as linguistic practices that organize the conditions of viewing in different ways. Rather than fixing meaning, they orient viewers' positions, attitudes, and interpretive possibilities within exhibition spaces. These cases also demonstrate that exhibition texts do not belong exclusively to a single regime of art; instead, multiple regimes intersect in practice, shaping how viewers emerge as subjects of perception and judgment. The following chapter takes up these observations to consider how exhibition texts relate to the three regimes of art in a more systematic manner.

V. Conclusion

Through the analyses undertaken in Chapters III and IV, this paper has shown that texts in museum exhibitions are not merely language that supplements or explains the meaning of artworks, but practices that shape the conditions of viewing experience. These analyses indicate that approaching exhibition texts as apparatuses that organize what is seen and how it is seen offers a productive perspective for understanding museum exhibitions.

On this basis, this chapter reconsiders how exhibition texts relate to the three regimes of art and clarifies the modes of transition and overlap that emerge between them, thereby drawing the conclusion of this paper.

V.1 Japanese Exhibition Contexts and the Problem of Translation

When the functions of exhibition texts discussed in this study are considered within the context of exhibition culture in Japan, the issue of "translation" acquires renewed significance. Modern museum exhibitions in Japan were established through the reception of Western art institutions; however, this process did not consist of a simple transfer of institutional forms. Rather, it constituted a translational practice that mediated and reconfigured different sensible orders. Exhibition texts were a key apparatus in this

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process: by naming and classifying objects and by addressing visitors in an institutionally sanctioned mode of viewing, they organized both what could appear as art and who could appear as its spectator.

From the outset of modern exhibition culture in Japan, operations associated with the representative regime were introduced through translation. Yet this regime did not take hold as a single, stable order. Instead, it was formed through tensions with existing cultures of viewing and sensibility. Within this process, exhibition texts functioned both as language that objectively describes works and as normative discourse that assigns a position to the viewer.

V.2 Closing Remarks

This paper has reconsidered exhibition texts not as auxiliary explanations attached to artworks, but as forms of narration that organize sensible relations within the exhibition space. Using the framework of Jacques Rancière's three regimes of art, it has examined how exhibition texts may operate in different ways depending on the regime with which they are aligned.

The discussion may be organized by distinguishing three functions that exhibition texts can assume in relation to Rancière's regimes of art. Under the ethical regime, exhibition texts may anchor artworks within social or moral frameworks. Under the representative regime, they may situate artworks within historical orders and guide the spectator's gaze. Within the aesthetic regime, they may depart from explanatory narration and appear as fragments that suspend the determination of meaning and open a space of sensory equality.

Rancière characterizes these regimes as distinct paradigms with different logics of visibility. At the same time, the case studies examined in this paper suggest that exhibition spaces may present configurations in which operations associated with different regimes intersect or overlap in practice. Rather than yielding a single model of exhibition text, the analyses have demonstrated variations shaped by institutional, historical, and curatorial contexts.

Within the public space of the museum, exhibition texts participate in organizing what appears as visible and how viewers are positioned in relation to artworks. In this sense, exhibition practices may be understood as engaging with the distribution of the sensible, insofar as they shape relations between visibility, discourse, and spectatorship. Exhibition is therefore not merely the act of displaying works, but a practice concerned with the configuration of these relations.

Today, museums are increasingly discussed as public spaces in which diverse languages and sensibilities intersect.[22] In this context, the task of exhibition texts does not lie in a binary choice between speaking and remaining silent, but in the structures of narration through which viewing experience is organized. When exhibition texts participate in reconfiguring sensible relations, the exhibition space can become a site in which society reflects on its own modes of perception through art.

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Endnotes:

1 See the following reference for a discussion of art and museums from political and social perspectives: Duncan 1995.

2 Karp, Lavine 1991. This volume represents a foundational body of scholarship that examines exhibitions as institutional and cultural practices, focusing on how display strategies participate in the construction of power relations and cultural meanings.

3 Didi-Huberman 1990. Didi-Huberman's work is particularly relevant for its attention to the problem of description and narrative stance in art-historical writing, highlighting how modes of textual articulation reflect specific assumptions about what constitutes "art."

4 Rancière 2000, p. 28.

5 Rancière 2000, p. 30.

6 In *Le partage du sensible* (Rancière 2000, p. 31), Rancière refers to the system as *esthétique des arts* ("the aesthetics of the arts," plural). However, in *Malaise dans l'esthétique* (2004, p. 17), where he classifies the three regimes of art, he employs the singular form *régime esthétique de l'art* ("the aesthetic regime of art"). The latter—using *l'art* in the singular—more accurately expresses the conceptual scope of Rancière's theory.

7 Rancière 2000, p. 32.

8 Rancière 2000, p. 39. See Schiller [1795] 1982..

9 Rancière 2004, p. 43.

10 Furuta 1996, pp. 42–43.

11 Kitazawa 2010, pp. 147-150. For detailed studies on the negotiation between Western and Japanese modernities through the notion of "art," see Kitazawa 2010; Kinoshita 1993; Sato 1996.

12 According to Furuta, exhibitions that assemble works in a single location and present them to the public can be traced back to the Muromachi period as a proto-form of display. In the Edo period, practices such as kaichō (public showings of temple treasures), product exhibitions (bussankai), and gatherings and displays of calligraphy and painting (shogakai and shoga tenkan) developed as exhibitionary forms that would later lead to the modern exhibition. See Furuta 2014, pp. 31-33.

13 As the Japanese government held several iterations of the National Industrial Exhibition—an event that could be regarded as a domestic counterpart to the World Expositions—the initially unified categories of painting and calligraphy gradually became separated over time. See: Yanagida 2023.

14 See Tokyo National Museum 1992.

15 The Japanese title of this exhibition has been translated by the author because its meaning does not exactly match the official English title; the same applies to *Van Gogh Impact*. This reflects the view that titles, too, are a form of text. For official English titles, see *Emulation and Admiration …* 2025*; A renewal of Passion…* 2025.

16 For installation views, see Bijutsu Techo, "Aichi Triennale 2019's After 'Freedom of Expression?': Nagoya Mayor Requests Removal of Statue of a Girl of Peace," August 2, 2019, https://bijutsutecho.com/magazine/news/headline/20275. (accessed October 14, 2025)

17 *A Renewal of Passion…* 2025.

18 *Kenjiro Okazaki…* 2025.

19 For example, one of the works bears the following title:

Heads poking out, a shape with lion body and man's head. A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun. Embankment crowded, a vast image troubles my sight. Everyone shouting, voices affectionate, half-crying. We're all gonna die. Darkness drops again. I heard ducks floating.

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Black rocks absorbed light. Was I all along born on the far shore? Cave pitch dark. Colors fade. Stretch out a hand. World already ended. Spread legs. Never to perish again. Only a presence – the subtle movement of air as someone searched. Solely ephemeral presence lingers. I remember who I am. Earthquake shook. Sun black as sackcloth. Moon like blood. Stars fell to earth, fig tree dropping unripe fruit. Sky split apart, mountains and islands moved. Kings, slaves shouted, "Hide us from the throne, from the Lamb's wrath." Their day has come. I'm gonna faint!

Refer to the exhibition website for images of the relevant works. https://www.mot-art-museum.jp/en/exhibitions/kenjiro/. (accessed October 14, 2025)

20 Rancière 2008, pp. 17-20.

21 For the curators' overview of the exhibition, see the official exhibition website: https://www.momat.go.jp/en/exhibitions/563. (accessed October 14, 2025)

22 International Council of Museums (ICOM), "Museum Definition – Standards & Guidelines," 24 Aug. 2022, https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/ (accessed 14 Oct. 2025).

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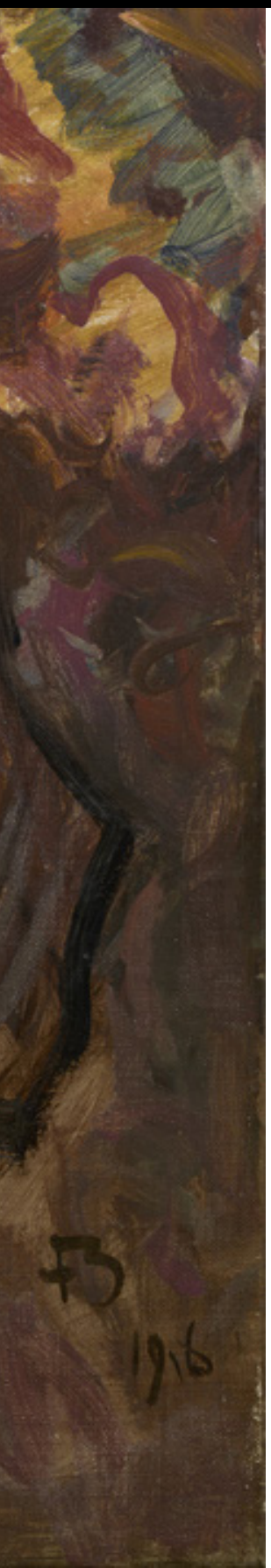
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The Formation of the Collection and Exhibition History of the National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo

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Keywords:
The National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo; Matsukata Collection; Collection History; Exhibition History; Exhibitions as a Revenue Source



ABSTRACT:

The National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo (NMWA), was founded on the Matsukata Collection, assembled by Kōjiro Matsukata beginning in 1916 during his visits to Europe. Around 400 works that had remained in Paris were seized by the French government during World War II and later returned to Japan. The museum, designed by Le Corbusier, opened in 1959 to house this collection and has since expanded its holdings. NMWA has organized over 300 exhibitions, playing a major role in popularizing Western art in Japan and advancing museum practice nationwide. A distinctive feature of its activities is the co-organization of exhibitions with newspaper and media companies, an important source of revenue. The museum now seeks to strengthen its programs by building on its collection, financial resources, and staff, while emphasizing permanent displays. Key challenges include enhancing its international presence and diversifying revenue sources to ensure sustainability.

Il National Museum of Western Art di Tokyo (NMWA) è stato fondato sulla base della Collezione Matsukata, assemblata da Kōjiro Matsukata a partire dal 1916 durante i suoi viaggi in Europa. Circa 400 opere che erano rimaste a Parigi furono sequestrate dal governo francese durante la Seconda Guerra Mondiale e successivamente restituite al Giappone. Il museo, progettato da Le Corbusier, è stato inaugurato nel 1959 per ospitare questa collezione e da allora ha ampliato le proprie raccolte. Il NMWA ha organizzato oltre 300 mostre, svolgendo un ruolo fondamentale nella diffusione dell'arte occidentale in Giappone e nello sviluppo delle pratiche museali a livello nazionale. Una caratteristica distintiva delle sue attività è la co-organizzazione di mostre con aziende editoriali e media, che rappresenta un'importante fonte di entrate. Il museo mira ora a rafforzare i propri programmi valorizzando la collezione, le risorse finanziarie e il personale, ponendo maggiore enfasi sulle esposizioni permanenti. Tra le principali sfide figurano il rafforzamento della presenza internazionale e la diversificazione delle fonti di reddito per garantire la sostenibilità.

Opening Picture:

Fig. 02: Frank Brangwyn, *Portrait of Mr. Kōjiro Matsukata*, 1916, The National Museum of Western Art, Donated by the heirs of Mr. Kōjiro Matsukata (Ex-Matsukata Collection).

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Nagako Kakehi

Head of International Projects, The National Museum of Western Art. Nagako Kakehi currently oversees exhibition management and registration at NMWA, with years of experience as an exhibition producer at a Japanese newspaper company. She was also Associate Professor, Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology, The University of Tokyo, in 2023, 2024 and 2025.



1

The National Museum of Western Art (NMWA; fig. 1) opened its doors in 1959 and has since drawn remarkably large audiences. In recent years, the depreciation of the Japanese yen has further boosted inbound tourism, with current annual attendance reaching approximately 1.5 million. Given the museum's relatively modest physical scale, this figure positions NMWA among the most frequently visited art institutions worldwide.

NMWA houses the most comprehensive collection of Western art not only in Japan but across Asia. It remains the sole institution in the region providing a coherent overview of Western art from the late Middle Ages through the mid-twentieth century. At present, alongside its permanent collection, the museum regularly organizes three major special exhibitions each year, thereby serving as a central venue for the presentation and interpretation of Western art to Japanese audiences.

The museum's architecture is equally significant: its Main Building and forecourt were designed by Le Corbusier. In 2016, the museum site was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List as part of *The Architectural Work of Le Corbusier, an Outstanding Contribution to the Modern Movement*. This designation has further heightened interest among visitors who seek to appreciate the museum not only for its collection but also for its architectural achievement.

The World Heritage designation, in turn, prompted renewed attention to the museum's origins. The institution was established to house a specific body of works—the Matsukata Collection—composed primarily of French art from the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. At its inauguration, the museum was often referred to as both "the museum of the Matsukata Collection" and "the museum of French art." Over time, however, the character of its

Fig. 1:
The National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo.

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collection expanded to encompass a broader narrative of Western art history.

This paper introduces this distinctive institution—still relatively little known outside Japan—by examining the formation of its collection and its exhibition history. Part I (by Watanabe) traces the genesis of the Matsukata Collection, the process leading to the museum's establishment, and the subsequent evolution of its holdings from 1959 to the present. Part II (by Kakehi) analyzes the museum's exhibition practices since its foundation, elucidating their development and identifying their defining characteristics.

I. NMWA Collection

I.1. The Formation of the Matsukata Collection

The Matsukata Collection comprises artworks assembled by Kōjiro Matsukata (1866–1950) over roughly a decade between 1916 and 1927. During this period, Matsukata acquired approximately 2,700 works of Western art in Europe. After a complex series of events, a portion of this collection was brought to Japan after World War II and became the core of NMWA. The Matsukata Collection has since become the subject of extensive scholarly inquiry, with significant advances achieved in recent years through two major exhibitions and the publication of *catalogue raisonné*. [1] The following section outlines the history of this remarkable collection, drawing on existing scholarship and related studies.

Kōjiro Matsukata, the third son of Masayoshi Matsukata, was educated in the United States at Rutgers University and Yale University, where he earned a doctorate in law. His father had served as both Minister of Finance and Prime Minister in the Meiji government. Upon returning to Japan, he became the founding president of Kawasaki Dockyard Corporation in Kobe in 1896. Under his leadership, the company diversified into naval shipbuilding, the production of submarines, railway cars, and other industrial products—activities that would later form the foundation of Kawasaki Heavy Industries, Ltd. Matsukata also served concurrently as president of the *Kobe Shimbun* newspaper.

World War I proved to be a decisive turning point for both Matsukata and the Kawasaki Dockyard. Anticipating wartime demand, he stockpiled steel and began constructing "stock boats"—vessels built prior to receiving orders. When war broke out, the global demand for ships surged, and nearly one hundred vessels were sold rapidly, generating immense profits. It was with these profits that Matsukata began to build his art collection, primarily during two extended sojourns in Europe.

During his first stay in Europe as president of Kawasaki Dockyard (25 March 1916 – 25 November 1918), Matsukata was based in London to promote ship sales. There, he met Frank Brangwyn—a painter, decorator, and architect—whose works he purchased in considerable numbers.[2] Brangwyn became one of Matsukata's most influential advisors on art acquisitions. During this period, Matsukata acquired a large number of works, including

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more than one hundred Old Master paintings as well as works by contemporary artists. Brangwyn's *Portrait of Kōjiro Matsukata* (1916; fig. 2) attests to their acquaintance and marks the beginning of Matsukata's serious engagement with art collecting.

In 1918, Matsukata traveled to Paris, where he encountered Léonce Bénédite, then director of the Musée du Luxembourg and later the first director of the Musée Rodin. Although their initial interaction concerned the production of bronze casts of Rodin's sculptures, Bénédite subsequently played a much broader role as Matsukata's advisor in France. [3]

Most of the Rodin sculptures acquired by Matsukata were new casts commissioned directly from the Musée Rodin. These commissions offered crucial financial support to the newly founded institution. Because the works remained in storage at the Musée Rodin for extended periods rather than being shipped to Japan immediately, some were reassigned to other buyers with Matsukata's consent and later replaced by newly cast versions. Notably, Matsukata was the first collector to commission casts of *The Gates of Hell*. He originally ordered two—one for Japan and one for the Musée Rodin—but the Japanese version was ultimately sold to the Philadelphia collector Jules E. Mastbaum. The version currently housed at NMWA is the third cast. Today, NMWA possesses sixty-one Rodin sculptures, fifty-three of which originate from the Matsukata Collection. [4]

Beyond Western art, he also purchased approximately 8,000 ukiyo-e prints in 1918 from Henri Vever, a Paris-based jeweler and prominent collector of Japanese art. In the same year, Matsukata extended his travels to Italy, acquiring paintings by Giovanni Segantini and sculptures by Leonardo Bistolfi. By the end of his stay in Europe, Matsukata had acquired more than 1,300 artworks (other than the ukiyo-e prints) which were subsequently shipped to Japan after the conclusion of World War I in 1919. However, many of the works purchased through Bénédite were not transported to Japan and remained in Paris.

Matsukata's second extended stay in Europe, from 14 April 1921 to 10 February 1922, was officially a business trip but is widely believed to have included a covert mission on behalf of the Japanese Navy to acquire blueprints of German U-boat technology.[5] During this period, he visited galleries in London and Paris, accompanied by the art historian Yukio Yashiro, who later documented the journey. Although Bénédite continued to advise Matsukata, Yashiro criticized his taste as "old-fashioned," referring to artists such as Charles Cottet, Lucien Simon, Henri Martin, and Albert Besnard.[6] Nevertheless, Matsukata's acquisitions were broad and inclusive, encompassing works not only from France but also from Britain, Italy, and Germany. He also acquired notable examples of contemporary art by Picasso, Matisse, and Bonnard.

Matsukata also followed the recommendations of his Japanese contemporaries: painter Bakusen Tsuchida urged him to purchase works by Gauguin; literature scholar Shōichi Naruse recommended Moreau and Courbet; and Yashiro himself suggested acquiring works by Renoir,

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24551



2

Cézanne, and Van Gogh.[7] Particularly noteworthy is Matsukata's acquisition of thirty-five works by Maurice Denis. Additional purchases in Berlin included tapestries, paintings, and prints.

Among the most significant acquisitions of this period were paintings by Claude Monet. Even before returning to Europe, Matsukata had prepared carefully to obtain works by the Impressionist master. During his stay in Paris, he visited Monet's studio in Giverny at least twice, securing the artist's agreement to sell him a substantial number of paintings. Today, thirty-four works by Monet from Matsukata's former collection are known, of which roughly fifteen are believed to have been acquired directly from the artist.[8] Twelve of these thirty-four works are now in the NMWA collection.

Matsukata continued to make acquisitions through agents even when he was not in Europe. Between late 1922 and 1923, he acquired thirty-four works from the collection of Danish industrialist Wilhelm Hansen.

A natural question arises: *why did Matsukata collect art?* One frequently cited source is the recollection of Yashiro, who reported that Matsukata wished to offer young Japanese artists—many of whom could not travel abroad—an opportunity to see authentic Western artworks, and that, if the government would not establish a museum for such a purpose, he intended to build one himself. His vision coincided with a broader contemporary movement in Japan advocating the creation of modern museums equipped with public and educational functions.[9]

Fig. 02: Frank Brangwyn, *Portrait of Mr. Kōjiro Matsukata*, 1916, The National Museum of Western Art, Donated by the heirs of Mr. Kōjiro Matsukata (Ex-Matsukata Collection).

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As an example of a collector contemporary with Matsukata, one may cite the industrialist Magosaburō Ōhara. Like Matsukata, Ōhara sought to provide young Japanese artists who were unable to study abroad with opportunities to encounter original works firsthand; to this end, between approximately 1920 and 1923, he acquired numerous works of Western art in Europe with the assistance of the painter Torajirō Kojima, whose overseas study he supported. Ōhara's collection was housed in the Ohara Museum of Art, which he himself established in Kurashiki, in western Japan, and it remains open to the public today. [10]

Matsukata, however, harbored still greater ambitions. He appears to have believed that the appreciation of fine art would contribute to Japan's industrial and cultural development, and accordingly envisioned a museum that could rival those of Europe and North America.

Evidence indicates that he had already commissioned Brangwyn in 1916 to design such a museum, tentatively titled the Kyōraku Bijutsukan ("Sheer Pleasure Arts Pavilion"). By late 1919, a site had been secured, and by 1922, the architectural plans were completed. The proposed building was centered on a courtyard with a fountain, and its exhibition galleries were to be illuminated by skylights (fig. 3). The envisioned collection included not only paintings and sculptures but also decorative arts such as furniture, ceramics, tiles, and carpets. There were even plans to relocate Brangwyn's studio to Japan.[11] Ultimately, however, Matsukata's ambitious dream was never realized.

I.2. From the Trials of the Matsukata Collection to the Opening of NMWA

By the early 1920s, the wartime economic boom had reversed into a severe depression, dealing a devastating blow to Japan's shipbuilding industry. The Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923 further destabilized the financial sector and indirectly triggered the financial crisis of 1927, leading to the collapse of the Jūgo Bank, the principal creditor of the Kawasaki Dockyard Corporation. The company consequently went bankrupt, and Kōjiro Matsukata was forced to resign as its president in 1928. During this turbulent period, many of the artworks Matsukata had previously shipped to Japan were seized by creditors, primarily the Jūgo Bank. Beginning in 1928, the collection was sold through seven major and several minor auctions, the last of which took place in March 1941.

A number of works dispersed during this period remain in Japan—for instance, Manet's *Self-Portrait* (Tokyo, Artizon Museum), Monet's *Haystacks* (Kurashiki, Ohara Museum of Art), and Degas' *Portrait of Manet and Madame Manet* (Kitakyushu Municipal Museum of Art). However, a significant number of works—such as Cézanne's *The House with the Cracked Walls* (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art)—were exported overseas. Meanwhile, the approximately 8,000 ukiyo-e prints Matsukata had acquired were not included in the liquidation process; they were later donated to the Imperial Household and eventually incorporated into the collection of the Imperial Museum (now the Tokyo National Museum).

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24551



3

Fig. 3:
Frank Brangwyn, *Aerial Perspective of Kyōraku Art Museum, Tokyo*, The National Museum of Western Art, Purchased with the assistance of the 2010 Art Acquisition Fund.

While this describes the fate of the portion of the collection that had reached Japan, the works remaining in Europe followed a different trajectory. In 1924, prior to Kawasaki Dockyard's bankruptcy, the Japanese government imposed a 100 percent import tariff on luxury goods—including European artworks—under legislation enacted in response to the domestic economic disruption following the Great Kantō Earthquake. As a result, it became difficult to ship the remaining pieces to Japan. Consequently, the works stored in Europe remained there.[12]

The segment of the collection housed in London was kept in the Pantechnicon warehouse, which was tragically destroyed by fire in October 1939, resulting in the loss of approximately 950 works.[13] Meanwhile, the portion stored in Paris—primarily consisting of works acquired through Léonce Bénédite—was held at the Musée Rodin, where Bénédite had served as director. However, that same year, with the outbreak of World War II and the subsequent German occupation of Paris, the collection faced renewed peril.

At this critical juncture, Kōzaburō Hioki, Matsukata's representative in Paris, played a decisive role. He removed between 400 and 500 works that had been entrusted to the Musée Rodin and clandestinely hid them in his residence in Abondant, a village on the outskirts of Paris. Following the Allied landing in Normandy on 20 June 1944, fearing bombardment by retreating German forces, Hioki transported the evacuated works back to Paris. During this period, most of the sculptures remained safely at the Musée Rodin. Nevertheless, in December 1944, the French government confiscated the collection as enemy property, in ac-

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24551

cordance with wartime policies.[14]

Following the confiscation, calls were repeatedly made in France for the collection to be permanently retained in French public museums, given its cultural value. Meanwhile, in postwar Japan, both the Matsukata family and the Japanese government began efforts to secure the collection's restitution. Ultimately, Matsukata's heirs agreed to relinquish all private ownership claims, facilitating diplomatic negotiations between the two nations.

Under the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty, the Matsukata Collection was formally recognized as the legal property of the French state. However, in subsequent bilateral discussions, French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman expressed goodwill toward returning the collection to Japan. This diplomatic gesture marked the beginning of formal negotiations, which eventually led to the repatriation of most of the works.

According to the final agreement, twenty particularly significant works were retained by France at the request of its national museums—among them Manet's *Woman with a Beer Mug*, Van Gogh's *Bedroom in Arles*, and Toulouse-Lautrec's *Justine Duret Sitting in the Garden*—now part of the Musée d'Orsay collection.[15] The remainder of the works were returned to Japan.

The return of the collection involved three conditions imposed on Japan. These included the construction of a museum dedicated to the Matsukata Collection; the retention in France of the cast of Rodin's *Burghers of Calais* commissioned by Matsukata, with the cost of producing a replacement borne by Japan; and the covering of all transportation expenses by the Japanese side.

In 1954, among several candidate sites, Ueno Park in Tokyo was selected as the museum's location at the request of the French side. The following year, Le Corbusier was appointed as the architect and visited the site in November 1955. His basic design, completed in 1957, was based on his concept of the *Musée à croissance illimitée* ("Museum of Unlimited Growth").

Le Corbusier's initial proposal went far beyond the Japanese side's original request, envisioning a comprehensive cultural complex that included not only an art museum but also spaces for temporary exhibitions and a theater. However, financial constraints made it impossible to realize this ambitious plan. The final design was adjusted in collaboration with his Japanese protégés—Junzō Sakakura, Kunio Maekawa, and Takamasa Yoshizaka—all of whom had previously apprenticed in his studio.

Construction began on 21 March 1958, and was completed on 31 March of the following year; the artworks arrived on 22 April, and the museum opened to the public on 10 June—all on an exceptionally tight schedule. The unveiling of the Matsukata Collection attracted extraordinary public attention; long queues formed daily as visitors eagerly awaited entry. Although only the permanent collection was displayed during the first year, the museum welcomed approximately 580,000 visitors within ten months.

Moreover, as will be discussed later, the collection was also presented in traveling exhibitions throughout Japan, allowing audiences nationwide

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to see the Matsukata Collection that had finally returned home after decades.

I.3. The Collection After the Opening

Although NMWA was originally established to house the Matsukata Collection, it soon began to receive donations of artworks unrelated to that collection, marking an early step in its transformation into a broader national institution for Western art. Among the most notable of these early contributions was Chaim Soutine's *Mad Woman* (P.1960-0001), formerly in the Shigetarō Fukushima Collection, donated shortly after the museum's opening. In 1965, the Yamamura family contributed a distinguished group of twentieth-century paintings, while between 1960 and 1978, the painter Ryūzaburō Umehara donated numerous works, including oil paintings by Renoir and Picasso, a pastel by Degas, and several examples of classical sculpture.

In the years immediately following the museum's inauguration, the acquisition of artworks through purchase was extremely limited due to severe budgetary constraints. The first fiscal year in which an acquisition budget was formally allocated was 1962, during which three paintings—all formerly part of the Matsukata Collection—were acquired: Giovanni Segantini's *Bagpipers of Brianza* (P.1962-0004), *Venus and Cupid* (P.1962-0003), then attributed to an anonymous artist but now classified within the sixteenth-century Emilia school, and Carlo Crivelli's *St. Augustine* (P.1962-0005), listed at the time as *Portrait of a Bishop*. The latter two works represented the museum's first acquisitions of Old Master paintings.

In 1963, sculptures by Aristide Maillol were acquired in conjunction with a special exhibition devoted to the artist. Subsequently, the museum pursued the acquisition of works not directly associated with Matsukata but produced during the same general period—namely, the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. A major policy revision in 1968 enabled the museum to acquire Old Master paintings dating as far back as the Renaissance.[16] Meanwhile, its acquisitions of modern art also continued, though limited chronologically to works created before 1920, in order to avoid overlapping with the collecting scope of the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo.

Initially, acquisitions were funded through the Agency for Cultural Affairs' budget for purchasing National Treasures and Important Cultural Properties, after which the works were transferred to NMWA via administrative reallocation. From 1981 onward, however, the museum began acquiring works using its own independent budget. Supplementary national budgets in 1978 and 1998 further enabled the acquisition of significant works that would otherwise have been beyond financial reach. Since the early 2010s, the Japanese government has provided an annual special acquisition fund to the Independent Administrative Institution National Museum of Art, which oversees seven museums (five of which actively acquire works). This financial framework has allowed NMWA to maintain a consistent and sustainable acquisition program.

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24551

During this period, the museum also continued to recover and receive donations of works originally from the Matsukata Collection. Notable examples include the 2001 donation of six tapestries that had been sold at the 1929 auction, and the 2017 acquisition of approximately two hundred works that had remained unsold during earlier liquidation and later entered a private Japanese collection. In addition, the museum's scope expanded through significant new donations beyond the Matsukata holdings—most prominently, the Hashimoto Collection (donated in 2012), consisting of roughly 870 rings, and the Naitō Collection (donated in 2015 and 2020), comprising medieval to Renaissance manuscript leaves. These donations substantially broadened the scope of the museum's collection into areas previously underrepresented.

As a result of sustained collecting efforts over more than six decades, the museum's holdings have expanded dramatically since its founding[17]:

These figures attest to the institution's evolution from a museum dedicated to a single donor's collection into a comprehensive repository capable of presenting a panoramic survey of Western art—realizing, in an expanded form, Matsukata's original vision of public access to Western masterpieces.

Since 2001, the museum's collection strategy has been articulated in successive five-year medium-term plans. While the first four plans (2001–2020) largely reiterated the same priorities, the fifth plan (2021–2025), released in April 2021, introduced substantial revisions that reflect broader disciplinary trends and institutional reorientation.

Year	Paintings	Drawings	Prints	Sculptures	Decorative Arts	Books	Reference Works	Total
At Opening (June 1959)	196	80	26	63	–	–	5	370
As of March 31, 2025	503	326	4,416	105	823	240	270	6,683

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Comparison of Collection Policies[18]

Phases 1–4 (2001–2020):

> *NMWA will enhance its holdings of modern French art centered on the Matsukata Collection, strengthen its collection of early modern European paintings, and systematically collect European prints, thereby enabling an overview of the development of Western art from the late Middle Ages to the early twentieth century.*

Phase 5 (2021–2025):

> *NMWA will strive to enrich the collection with works from essential periods and regions necessary for a systematic and comprehensive overview of Western art from the Middle Ages to the first half of the twentieth century, while also actively collecting works by female artists. Regarding the Matsukata Collection—the foundation of the museum—acquisitions will be guided by the results of ongoing research. Furthermore, the museum will systematically collect works of diverse styles and subjects to enable a comprehensive survey of European print history.*

Compared with the previous plans, which defined the chronological scope as "from the late Middle Ages to the early twentieth century," the fifth plan expands this range to begin in the Middle Ages and to include the first half of the twentieth century. Geographically, the emphasis has shifted from "modern French art" to encompass the whole of Europe, leading to a further diversification of acquisitions from regions absent in the Matsukata Collection, such as Northern Europe and modern Spain. Recent acquisitions reflecting this broadened scope include Akseli Gallen-Kallela's *Lake Keitele* (P.2021-0001), August Strindberg's *Inferno* (P.2022-0001), and Joaquín Sorolla's *The Drinking Jug* (P.2022-0002).

Equally significant is the inclusion, for the first time, of an explicit institutional commitment to the active acquisition of works by women artists, reflecting recent developments in art-historical scholarship and curatorial ethics. In line with this policy, recent acquisitions include Camille Claudel's *Perseus and the Gorgon* (S.2021-0001), Lavinia Fontana's *Portrait of Antonietta Gonzales* (P.2024-0004), and Fede Galizia's *Judith with the Head of Holofernes* (P.2024-0005).

Through these developments, NMWA has continuously redefined the contours of its collection while maintaining its foundational identity rooted in the Matsukata legacy. In doing so, it has evolved from a postwar diplomatic gesture into a leading institution that not only preserves but also critically interprets the history of Western art in Japan and across Asia.

II. NMWA Exhibitions and Displays

II.1. Classification of Exhibitions and Displays

Since its opening in 1959, the exhibitions and displays organized by NMWA can broadly be classified into five categories:

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24551

A. The Collection (Permanent Display): Exhibitions displaying works from the museum's collection.

B. Exhibition: Small-scale presentations composed primarily of works from the collection, often held in The Collection Gallery.

C. Museum-organized Special Exhibition: Exhibitions featuring mainly borrowed works from external collections, organized and financed solely by the museum.

D. Co-organized Special Exhibition: Large-scale exhibitions primarily composed of borrowed works, co-organized with media companies or other partners.

E. Touring Exhibition / Joint Exhibition: Exhibitions held at other institutions utilizing works from NMWA's collection.

These formats have evolved in response to societal changes and the museum's expansion and renovation projects. The following sections outline this evolution by era.[19] For convenience, exhibitions B through E—held for limited durations of a few months—are collectively referred to as "Temporary Exhibitions," while categories C and D are collectively termed "Special Exhibitions."

II.2. Evolution and Characteristics

(1) Main Building Period (Opening to 1970s)

Established as a facility for displaying the Matsukata Collection, NMWA initially presented only a Permanent Display. Its first temporary exhibition, *Masterpieces of the Ex-Matsukata Collection* (1960; fig. 4), commemorated the museum's first anniversary and assembled approximately 200 works, including pieces from the ex-Matsukata Collection that had been dispersed across Japan. Subsequently, the Main Building began hosting special exhibitions approximately once or twice per year.

Notable exhibitions from this period include landmark shows realized through government-level collaboration, such as *La Vénus de Milo* (1964), held to commemorate the Tokyo 1964 Olympic Games, and *La Joconde* (1974), made possible through negotiations between the Japanese and French governments. In several cases, NMWA assumed curatorial responsibilities for exhibitions held at the Tokyo National Museum, also located in Ueno Park.[20] These included *La Joconde* and *Art français 1840–1940* (1961-1962), which introduced the development of modern French art through approximately 480 works on loan from the French government.

(2) After the Completion of the New Wing (1980s–1990s)

In May 1979, the New Wing—offering approximately 1,500 m² of exhibition space—was completed, doubling the museum's total display area. This expansion enabled simultaneous presentations: the Main Building continued to exhibit the collection, while the New Wing hosted special exhibitions, increasing their annual frequency to two or three.

A defining feature of this period was the intensification of international exchange with museums and specialists abroad, supported by Japan's economic growth. This fostered the realization of more ambitious and

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24551



4

Fig. 4: Exhibition Catalogue of *Masterpieces of the Ex-Matsukata Collection.*

academically grounded exhibitions. Notable examples include *Japonisme* (1988), jointly researched and organized with the Musée d'Orsay and presented at the Grand Palais in Paris before its Tokyo showing, whose catalogue received critical acclaim; *Vincent van Gogh* (1985) and *Space in European Art: Council of Europe Exhibition in Japan* (1987), both of which were accompanied by international symposiums.

Meanwhile, the proliferation of art museums across Japan and the increasing accessibility of overseas travel heightened public interest in Western art. Leveraging the promotional capacity of co-organizing media companies, many exhibitions during this period attracted more than 300,000 visitors. A notable peak was reached with *Great French Paintings from the Barnes Foundation* (1994). Following its presentations at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and the Musée d'Orsay, Paris, the co-organizer, *The Yomiuri Shimbun*, assembled 13 sponsors and launched an intensive promotional campaign that drew an extraordinary total of 1,071,352 visitors.[21]

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(3) After the Completion of the Special Exhibition Wing (1998–2010s)

In December 1997, the Special Exhibition Wing (approx. 1,500 m² of exhibition space) was completed underground in the forecourt of the Main Building. This addition enabled the museum to present The Collection in both the Main Building and the New Wing, while hosting up to three special exhibitions annually in the new facility. Prior to this, the Matsukata Collection had been displayed in the Main Building and other holdings in the New Wing. The new configuration integrated the Main Building and the New Wing into a single, chronological presentation tracing the history of Western art. Furthermore, from 2001 onward, the museum regularly organized two to three small-scale Exhibitions each year within the Prints and Drawings Gallery as part of the permanent display area.

Notable exhibitions of this period included the inaugural *Claude Lorrain and the Ideal Landscape* (1998), *Georges de La Tour* (2005), and *Vilhelm Hammershøi: The Poetry of Silence* (2008)—all of which introduced artists previously unseen in major Japanese exhibitions—as well as *Henri Matisse: Processus / Variation* (2004), distinguished by its clear thematic focus and rigorous research. Among the most significant undertakings was *The Matsukata Collection: A One-Hundred-Year Odyssey* (2019), organized in celebration of NMWA's 60th anniversary (fig. 5). This exhibition marked the first comprehensive presentation of the Matsukata Collection at NMWA since 1960 *Masterpieces of the Ex-Matsukata Collection* exhibition, synthesizing six decades of curatorial scholarship in an exhibition, catalogue and *catalogue raisonné*. It reaffirmed that both the Matsukata collection itself and its sustained study constitute an integral part of NMWA's mission.

The museum also hosted a number of exhibitions serving diplomatic and cultural exchange objectives, including *Il Rinascimento in Italia: La civiltà delle corti* (2001), a central event of *Italia in Giappone 2001*, and *Skagen: An Artists' Colony in Denmark* (2017), held to commemorate the 150th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Denmark and Japan.

Another major milestone of this period was the 2016 inscription of the Main Building and its forecourt as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This brought renewed attention to the museum's architectural heritage and resulted in a marked increase in attendance for The Collection.[22]

(4) Post-COVID Period and Forecourt Reorganization (2020–)

Beginning in October 2020, the museum closed for approximately eighteen months for renovations to the Special Exhibition Wing and the forecourt. Upon reopening in April 2022, The Collection display underwent updates. While maintaining its chronological narrative, the museum introduced small-scale thematic presentations titled *Collection in FOCUS* across various sections, highlighting works through in-depth art historical interpretations, as well as broader perspectives including conservation and conservation science.

The COVID-19 pandemic also accelerated a global trend toward

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Fig. 5: Installation view of the entrance area of *The Matsukata Collection: A One-Hundred-Year Odyssey*. Photo by NMWA.

organizing exhibitions based on institutional, local and domestic collections—a shift evident at NMWA as well. Representative examples include *Manuscripts from the Naitō Collection in the National Museum of Western Art* (2024), centered on a major private donation, and *La Bretagne, source d'inspiration: regards de peintres français et japonais* (2023), which presented approximately 160 works on the theme of Brittany, France, drawn almost entirely from collections within Japan.

At the same time, large-scale international loan exhibitions have re-emerged. *Monet: The Late Waterscapes* (2024-2025), composed mainly of loans from the Musée Marmottan Monet in Paris, attracted 807,566 visitors, attesting to the public's enduring interest in Western art.

(5) Exhibitions Held at Other Museums

Following the museum's opening in 1959, numerous requests were received from across Japan to host the Matsukata Collection. In response, the touring exhibition *The Matsukata Collection of the National Museum of Western Art* was presented twenty-three times between 1962 and 1977, beginning at the Hakutsuru Museum in Kobe, where Matsukata had established his business base, and was enthusiastically received nationwide.[23]

During the 1980s and 1990s, instead of the Matsukata Collection exhibitions, the museum endeavored to contribute to regional cultural enrichment by sending exhibitions featuring works from NMWA's own collection, such as the *Max Klinger*

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and *The French Modern Painting, from the National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo*. It also participated in the *Agency for Cultural Affairs Traveling Exhibition*, organized jointly with other national museums. Since the 2000s (2003–2024), this initiative has evolved into the National Museum of Art Touring Exhibition, through which each national museum in turn has organized an exhibition for regional art museums. NMWA has participated in this program approximately once every five years.

In 2023, two new nationwide initiatives were launched by the National Center for Art Research—established within the National Museum of Art—to collaborate with museums throughout Japan utilizing works from national collections, including those of NMWA. *Collection DIALOGUE* aims to foster dialogue between collections by combining works from a national art museum with those of a host institution to reveal new interpretive possibilities. *Collection PLUS*, meanwhile, enriches regional collection exhibitions by integrating a small number of works from national holdings into local displays to create new, thematically focused presentations.

Looking back over its history, NMWA has consistently presented exhibitions falling into the following broad categories:

(1) cultural-diplomacy exhibitions realized through intergovernmental collaboration;

(2) high-quality scholarly exhibitions developed through global museum networks and academic research;

(3) exhibitions introducing artists and works not yet widely known in Japan; and

(4) large-scale exhibitions co-organized with media partners to foster broader appreciation of Western Art.

A further characteristic of the museum's activities has been the publication of bilingual catalogues for nearly all special exhibitions, ensuring both scholarly rigor and archival permanence. Moreover, at a time when art museums were still scarce in Japan, NMWA contributed to the enhancement of regional culture through touring exhibitions of its collection, and in later decades, through collaboration with museums nationwide, it has continued to play a vital role in the development of museum practice across the country.

II.3. Special Exhibitions as a Revenue Source

While the previous section discussed the cultural and curatorial significance of exhibitions, their financial role must also be considered. In the initial budget for fiscal year 2023, operating subsidies accounted for approximately 77% of total income, with self-generated revenue making up the remaining 23%. Although the precise proportion of admission fees within self-generated income is not publicly disclosed, it is reasonable to assume that they represent a substantial share. Since income from off-site exhibitions does not accrue to NMWA, current admission revenue derives solely from The Collection (including small Exhibitions) and Special Exhibitions.

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Since 2017, the museum's admission system has consisted of two categories: The Collection (500 yen for adults) and Special Exhibitions (1,600–2,300 yen for adults). A ticket for a Special Exhibition also grants same-day access to The Collection. As indicated in Figure 6, Special Exhibitions have generally attracted larger audiences than The Collection, while visitors to The Collection comprised nearly half of total attendance only during the COVID-affected fiscal years 2022–2023.[24] Furthermore, in fiscal year 2023, approximately 46% of The Collection visitors entered using Special Exhibition tickets, whereas only 28% paid specifically for The Collection (adults and college students) (figs. 7, 8).[25] Considering both ticket prices and attendance figures, it is evident that revenue from Special Exhibitions plays a crucial role in sustaining the museum's overall financial stability.

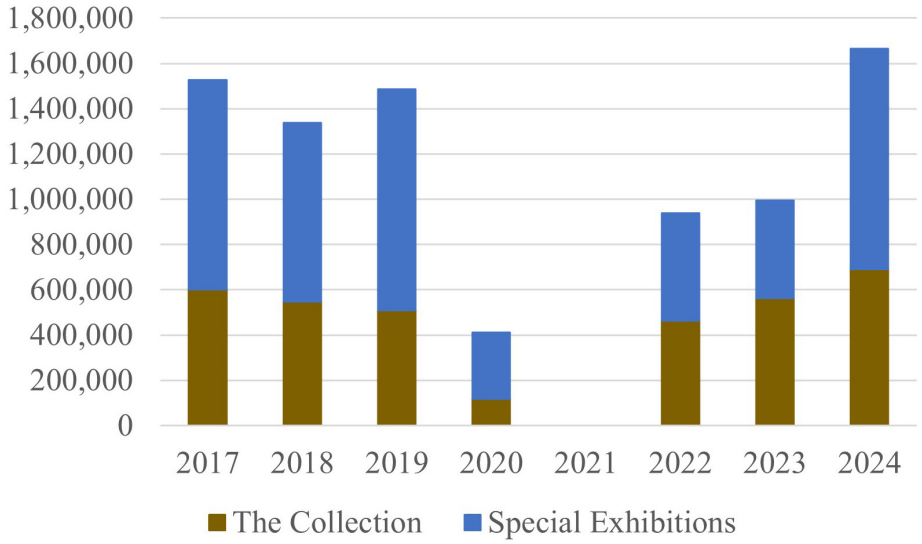
II.4. The Situation Surrounding Special Exhibitions

NMWA's Special Exhibitions comprise Museum-organized Exhibitions funded from the museum's own budget and Co-organized Exhibitions mounted in partnership with media organizations. Although such collaborations are rare in Europe and North America, they have been a well-established practice in Japan since the postwar era.[26] Media companies—particularly newspapers—have long produced and hosted art exhibitions as part of their mission of cultural contribution and corporate social responsibility. In the 1950s, they were able to take advantage of privileges such as maintaining overseas offices and enjoying greater flexibility in foreign currency usage.[27] Additional benefits, including enhanced visibility, increased circulation, exhibitions as original news content, and opportunities for reader engagement, also contributed to the expansion of these ventures.[28] NMWA has also held many co-organized exhibitions since its first, *Masterpieces of the Ex-Matsukata Collection* (1960), held in partnership with *The Asahi Shimbun*.[29] This system, initially led by newspapers, came to include television stations from the 1970s, and as for NMWA, the first exhibition co-organized with a broadcasting company was the *Vincent van Gogh* Exhibition in 1976, co-organized by *The Tokyo Shimbun*, *The Chunichi Shimbun*, and *Chubu-Nippon Broadcasting Co., Ltd.*.

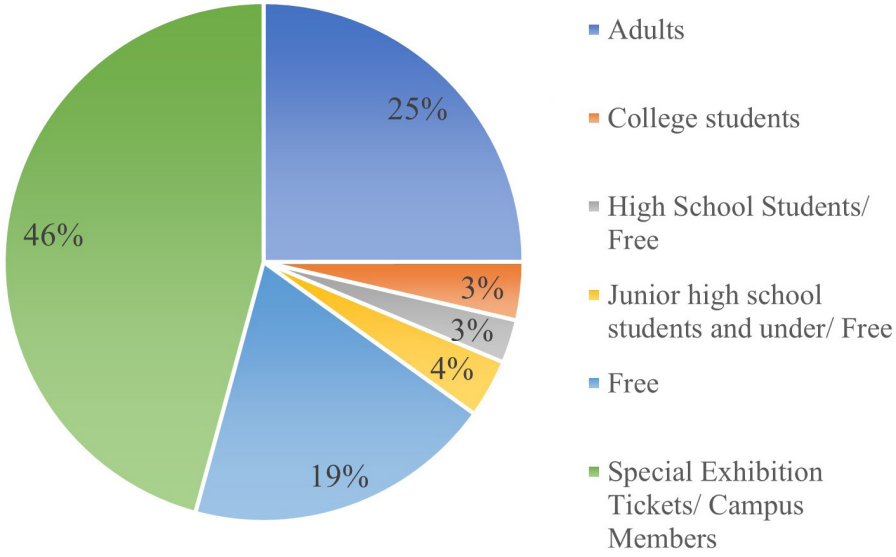
Under this framework, nearly all exhibition expenses are borne by the co-organizers—typically media corporations—who also receive the majority of the associated revenue.[30] While these companies assume the financial risks, they also recognize the significance and benefits described above. For the museum, this arrangement allows it to present large-scale, high-quality exhibitions and secure a stable income stream without incurring significant financial risk. In this sense, NMWA's partnerships with mass media have played an important role in expanding Japan's audience for Western art.[31]

However, since the 2000s, transformations in the media landscape driven by the rise of the internet, changes in the environment surrounding the department store industry which functioned as an art exhibition venue in Japan, and

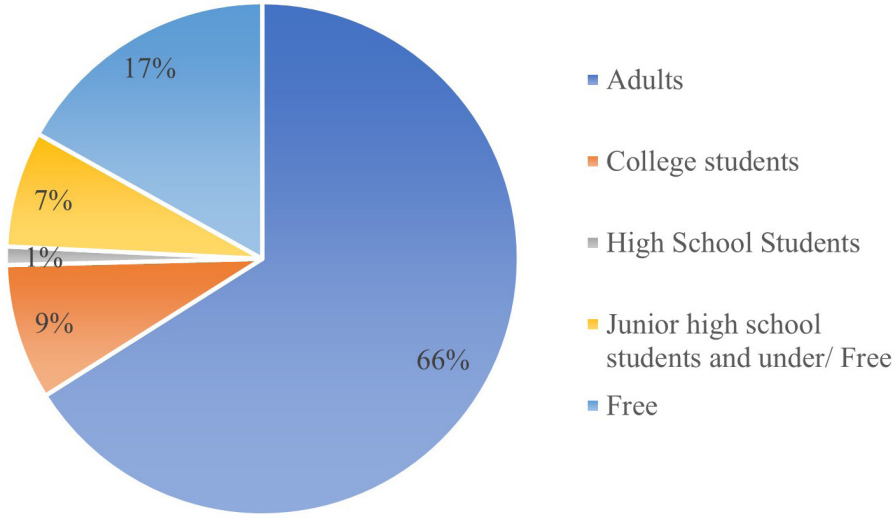
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Fig. 6:
Visitors to the NMWA, FY2017-FY2024.

Fig. 7:
Visitors to The Collection, FY2023.

Fig. 8:
Visitors to Special Exhibitions, FY2023 .

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budget cuts affecting local public museums—have altered the perspectives of co-organizers. As Kawahara notes, there has been "a stronger tendency to pursue business success more rigorously, rather than promoting cultural advancement as before."[32]

Traditionally, NMWA maintained a schedule of one Museum-organized Special Exhibition and one or two Co-organized Special Exhibitions annually. Among its notable Museum-organized Special Exhibitions were *Maillol* (1963), which was the first exhibition in Japan to introduce the master sculptor, *American Paintings 1730–1960: A Selection from the Collection of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd* (1982)—Japan's first comprehensive survey of American painting for 250 years—and *Rhetorik der Leidenschaft – Zur Bildsprache der Kunst im Abendland: Meisterwerke aus der Graphischen Sammlung Albertina und aus der Porträtsammlung der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek* (1999), organized for the NMWA's 40th anniversary and later toured to the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg. Nevertheless, because of budgetary and staffing limitations, since the 1980s most Museum-organized Special Exhibitions consisted primarily of prints and drawings borrowed from a single source. Following the museum's conversion to an Independent Administrative Institution in 2001, and the resulting reductions in its annual budget, all Special Exhibitions held between fiscal year 2011 and 2022 were Co-organized Exhibitions.[33]

The COVID-19 pandemic, beginning in 2020, revealed structural vulnerabilities in this model. For media companies bearing the financial risk, the visitor capacity limits imposed to prevent infection meant capped admission revenues, rendering large-scale exhibitions unfeasible. Moreover, the museum's main demographic — middle-aged and older visitors — was particularly affected by health concerns. Although attendance began to recover after the pandemic, rising transportation and labor costs, combined with the depreciation of the yen, have made exhibitions relying heavily on international loans increasingly risky. NMWA had perceived signs of this prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, however, it came to a renewed recognition of the fact that Co-organized Special Exhibitions—which had long occupied a vital place in its revenue structure—could not be expected to continue on a sustained basis.[34]

Relying exclusively on Co-organized Exhibitions also had operational implications. In such collaborations, the co-organizer typically undertakes comprehensive management of the entire project, assuming responsibility not only for publicity—including the use of their own media platforms—but also for a wide range of practical operations such as loan negotiations, transportation and insurance arrangements, ticketing, merchandise production and sponsorship coordination, while the museum concentrated primarily on curatorial work, on-site operations, and facility management. Consequently, NMWA had limited opportunity to build institutional expertise in producing large-scale exhibitions with international loans independently.

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In response, and prompted by the pandemic, NMWA has re-evaluated its exhibition strategy and resumed organizing Special Exhibitions funded and produced internally.[35] Based on meticulous curatorial research and with curators' perspectives, these exhibitions—such as *Imaged and Imagined: Spain Seen through Prints from Japanese Collections* (2023), composed entirely of works from domestic collections, and *Does the Future Sleep Here? – Revisiting the Museum's Response to Contemporary Art after 65 Years* (2024), the first collaboration with contemporary artists since the museum's founding—represent the museum's renewed commitment to autonomous, research-driven exhibition-making.

II.5. Future Exhibitions

To ensure the sustainable continuation of museum-organized exhibitions, a robust financial foundation is indispensable. In 2025, NMWA established "The National Museum of Western Art Shibahara Keiichi Fund" through a donation of 500 million yen from the Japanese businessman Mr. Keiichi Shibahara, dedicated specifically to supporting future exhibition initiatives. Furthermore, since 2022, the museum has implemented structural reforms to enhance its exhibition management framework: (i) the establishment of the Office of Development and External Affairs, which assumed part of the exhibition production process, such as marketing, promotion and sponsorship, and (ii) the creation of new professional positions, including Registrar, Exhibition Manager, and Fundraising Officer.

These reforms represent an important step toward addressing a long-standing structural challenge faced by the national museums as identified by the Council for Cultural Affairs: "In large-scale exhibitions borrowing works from overseas, there exists an unavoidable structure of financial and personnel dependence on external organizations."[36] The next challenge will be to accumulate institutional expertise in organizing special exhibitions and to ensure the continuity of such expertise amid frequent fixed-term employment and personnel transfers.[37]

Several years after the pandemic, collaborative proposals from media companies have begun to recover. It remains valuable to pursue high-quality exhibitions through such partnerships, utilizing the extensive experience and networks built by media companies as co-organizers, while also reaching a broad audience. As NMWA continues to accumulate in-house experience in producing special exhibitions, it will be better positioned to "explore appropriate and effective forms of organic collaboration with media companies," as recommended by the Council for Cultural Affairs.[38]

At the same time, strengthening The Collection display is a strategic priority. By leveraging the research achievements and international networks of its curators and other staff, the museum can enhance the value of its permanent display—the only one in Asia offering a comprehensive overview of Western art history. Doing so is expected not only to diversify and stabilize admission revenues, which have long

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depended heavily on special exhibitions, but also to stimulate other museum activities, including the museum shop, café, and sponsorship programs—thus acting as an institutional driver.

In conclusion, NMWA's trajectory—from its origins as a facility for the Matsukata Collection to its present role as a museum uniquely dedicated to Western art in Asia—illustrates its steady development in both collections and exhibitions. Since opening, its collection has expanded nearly twentyfold, it has organized more than 300 exhibitions, and total attendance, including The Collection displays, has reached approximately 48 million visitors, or about 51 million when off-site exhibitions are included. Adapting continuously to changes in the social environment surrounding museums, NMWA has contributed both to the fostering of an understanding of Western art and to the advancement of museum activities across Japan. Looking ahead, as Japan's sole national museum specializing in Western art, it will continue to fulfill its mission through acquisition, exhibition, and programming—continually redefining the nature of its collection and exhibitions in step with the times.

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Endnotes:

1 Major recent publications on the Matsukata Collection include: Kobe City Museum 2016; Kawaguchi, Jingaoka 2018; Kawaguchi, Jingaoka 2019; Jingaoka 2019.

2 Matsukata owned 80 oil paintings, 111 drawings, and 386 prints by Brangwyn.

3 For the relationship between Matsukata and Bénédite, see Mathieu 2016.

4 On the Rodin sculptures in the Matsukata Collection, see Buley-Uribe 2002. For the *Gates of Hell* casts commissioned by Matsukata, see Mabuchi 2019.

5 See Yashiro 1958, p. 73, among other sources.

6 Yashiro 1972, p. 208.

7 Yashiro 1972, p. 205.

8 Jingaoka 2019, p. 17.

9 Oya 2010, p. 229.

10 For studies that examine the Ōhara Collection in comparison with the Matsukata Collection, see Miyazaki 2007, pp. 269-278; Kajiya 2020, pp. 279-280. For the Ōhara Collection, see also Minato 2002, p. 142.

11 For Matsukata's museum concept, see Minato 1984; Minato 2002; Oya 2010.

12 Kawaguchi 2017, pp. 9–10.

13 Kawaguchi 2017.

14 On the postwar disposition of the Matsukata Collection in France, see Lacambre 2019.

15 Other works retained in France include four by Gauguin, one by Courbet, three by Bonvin, three Cézanne watercolors, one watercolor by Moreau, one by Picasso, two by Soutine, and one by Marquet. Renoir's *Parisiennes in Algerian Costume or Harem* (P.1959-0182) was initially included on the list of works not to be returned, but was removed following repeated requests from the Japanese side. For further details on the circumstances surrounding the collection's return, see Taruki 1987–1989.

16 For NMWA's acquisition policy regarding Old Master paintings, see Kawase 2025.

17 This table is based on NMWA 2025 and NMWA 2026.

18 The medium-term plan is available (in Japanese) at the following site (accessed 25 February 2026): https://www.artmuseums.go.jp/corporate_info/gyoumu/chuki_keikaku.

19 In writing this chapter, the author drew extensively on NMWA 1989, NMWA 2009a and NMWA 2009b.

20 In the case of *La Joconde*, the venue was selected as the Tokyo National Museum because plans for a concurrent *Cézanne* exhibition at NMWA were already underway, and the Tokyo National Museum was considered more suitable for accommodating large visitor numbers, given its spacious forecourt and efficient internal circulation. Agency for Cultural Affairs 1975, p. 6.

21 Suyama 2023, p. 298.

22 Compared with an average of approximately 320,000 visitors to The Collection during fiscal years 2011–2015, attendance reached approximately 710,000 in fiscal year 2016 and about 600,000 in fiscal year 2017.

23 At the time of opening, the museum internally adopted a policy to decline requests for lending works from the Matsukata Collection for the time being. Instead, after a period devoted to organizing the works, one or two touring exhibitions would be scheduled each year at appropriate times, when deemed suitable. Until then, even individual works would not to be lent. Kamon 1968, pp. 168–169.

24 Fig. 6 is compiled from NMWA 2019; NMWA 2025, p. 58; NMWA 2026, p.66.

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25 Fig. 7 and 8 are based on NMWA 2025, p. 58.

26 Co-organized exhibitions between national museums and media organizations have continued since the *Henri Matisse* Exhibition held at the Tokyo National Museum in 1951 and have persisted into the twenty-first century. Agency for Cultural Affairs 2025, pp. 12-13.

27 Suyama 2023, p. 300.

28 Kawahara 2025.

29 When NMWA presented the Matsukata Collection exhibition off-site, it created an optimal exhibition space within the Main Building, marking the beginning of co-organized exhibitions. Taruki 1987-1989, vol.2, pp. 158–159.

30 Agency for Cultural Affairs 2025, p.26.

31 Conversely, the disadvantages of co-organized exhibitions have also been noted. For example, the emphasis placed by co-organizers on revenue generation tends to increase promotional workloads and results in demanding negotiations at each stage of preparation, placing considerable strain on the responsible curators. Mabuchi 2021.

32 Kawahara 2025.

33 In 2001, as part of the central government's administrative reforms, NMWA, together with the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo; the National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto; and the National Museum of Art, Osaka, became an independent administrative institution under the National Museum of Art. The transition was expected to enable more flexible and autonomous management, including the introduction of external funding.

34 Mabuchi 2021.

35 The museum's budget was not increased; rather, exhibitions were realized through reallocations from other projects or by securing independent sponsorship support.

36 Agency for Cultural Affairs 2025, p. 12-13. The Council for Cultural Affairs is responsible for research and deliberations on important cultural matters in response to requests from the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology or the Commissioner for Cultural Affairs.

37 Staff at the National Museum of Art are broadly divided into administrative and research personnel. Administrative staff are hired centrally by the headquarters and undergo cross-functional transfers every two or three years to gain wide-ranging institutional experience. In addition, a fixed-term specialist system exists for roles such as fundraising. Research positions include both permanent appointments and fixed-term research fellowships (three to five years). At NMWA, the total staff consists of 32 full-time (including fixed-term) and 14 part-time members (as of July 1, 2023).

38 Agency for Cultural Affairs 2025, p. 12-13.

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美術館

An Examination of Museology in Japan: Current Trends and Future Directions

Hidenori Kurita

Keywords:
Museology in Japan; Museum Act; Curatorship; Social Education; Museum as Forum



ABSTRACT:

This paper explores the present state and prospective developments of museology as an academic discipline in Japan. It begins with an overview of the current conditions of museums and the field of museology in the country. Early efforts in establishing museology are examined, with particular attention to the contributions of Tanahashi Gentarō. Discussion then turns to the enactment of the *Museum Act* and related institutional developments, highlighting the work of Tsuruta Sōichirō. The unique features and ongoing challenges of the Japanese curator system and museum management are also addressed. Further, the paper considers the emergence of museology as a distinct academic field and the search for a renewed vision of the museum, referencing the ideas of Itō Toshirō. The study concludes by outlining potential directions for the evolution of museology in Japan.

L'articolo esamina lo stato attuale e gli sviluppi futuri della museologia come disciplina accademica in Giappone. Si apre con una panoramica sulle condizioni attuali dei musei e dell'ambito museologico nel Paese. Vengono analizzati i primi tentativi di fondare la museologia, con particolare attenzione ai contributi di Tanahashi Gentarō. Successivamente si affronta la promulgazione del *Museum Act* e i relativi sviluppi istituzionali, mettendo in luce l'opera di Tsuruta Sōichirō. Sono inoltre trattate le peculiarità e le sfide tuttora aperte del sistema curatoriale giapponese e della gestione museale. L'articolo considera inoltre l'affermazione della museologia come campo accademico autonomo e la ricerca di una rinnovata visione del museo, facendo riferimento alle idee di Itō Toshirō. Lo studio si conclude tracciando le possibili traiettorie di sviluppo della museologia in Giappone.

Opening Picture:

Detail from Fig. 1.

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Introduction

This paper re-examines the challenges facing Japan's museum system and museology, prompted by the 2023 revision of the Museum Act and supplementary resolutions from the Diet. The revised Act addresses key issues, including reforming the registration system, reconciling public purpose with private sector vitality, enhancing the professionalism of museum directors, redefining and improving the treatment of curators, and strengthening partnerships, funding, and public relations. These issues are not merely operational; they touch on the fundamental relationship between a museum's core philosophy and its professional structure. This paper focuses on the growing disconnect between institutional frameworks (administration and law) and foundational philosophies (educational perspectives and public purpose), a gap that has led to the fragility of the curatorial system.

To provide historical context, this paper examines the development of Japan's museum system in three phases. The first is the birth of the "social education-type" museum from the Meiji period to the pre-war era. Influenced by Fukuzawa Yukichi's enlightenment philosophy and experiences from world expositions, the experimental exhibitions of educational museums and the institutional development of the Imperial Museum advanced in parallel. This phase saw a coexistence of industrial promotion and national edification. The second phase is the establishment of the post-war social education system. The Museum Act of 1951 legally positioned museums established by local public entities and private organizations as social education facilities, providing a theoretical foundation for the four-function system of "collection, preservation, research, and educational outreach" outlined by Tsuruta Sōichirō in his "Introduction to Museology" (1956). The third phase involves the development of regionalization and citizen participation from the 1980s onward. Itō Toshirō, in his "On Regional Museums" (1986) and *Open Up, Museums!* (1991),[1] re-conceptualized museums as sites for community learning and dialogue, advocating for the reintegration of exhibition, education, and research.

Exhibitions have long served as a nexus where educational philosophy, institutional frameworks, and professional practice converge. For Tanahashi Gentarō, exhibitions were an educational practice—a "visual educational device."[2] Tsuruta Sōichirō understood them as an institutional structure that integrates a museum's functions.[3] Later, Itō Toshirō redefined exhibitions as a social act that fosters dialogue and collaboration within the community. Tracing the philosophical and institutional changes in exhibitions is akin to re-examining the development of museology itself. This paper connects institutional history (changes in law, administration, and management), intellectual history (transformations in educational philosophy, public purpose, and exhibition concepts), and the history of professional education (curator training and professional formation) to provide a comprehensive analysis of these three interconnected aspects: institutions, philosophy, and professionalism.

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The paper is structured as follows: Chapter 1 traces the policies of the Meiji era, the experimental exhibitions of educational museums, and the institutional shift to the Imperial Museum, clarifying the philosophical transition from industrial promotion to national cultural integration. Chapter 2 focuses on Tsuruta Sōichirō's functionalist museology, organizing the philosophy and institutional framework of the Museum Act and exploring the reintegration of the curator's dual role as researcher and educator. Chapter 3 examines Itō Toshirō's theory of community museums and the concept of "co-learning and co-creation," referencing practical research. The final chapter, based on the revised Museum Act and supplementary resolutions, proposes a new operational framework centered on professional qualifications for directors, the redefinition of curatorial roles, the philosophy of the forum-type museum, and the introduction of intermediary professionals to connect directors and curators. It includes recommendations for governance, finance, and evaluation systems.

I: The Establishment of Modern Japanese Museums and the Development of Their Educational Philosophy: From Industrial Promotion to Social Education

I.1. The Reception of Museums in the Late Edo Period and the Establishment of National Museums

During the late Edo period, many Japanese who visited the West understood museums as discrete facilities like natural history or industrial halls, using terms such as hyakubutsukan ("hall of a hundred things") or hakubutsusho ("institute of natural history"). They did not fully grasp the Western concept of the comprehensive museum as an integrated apparatus of knowledge encompassing libraries, art galleries, and botanical gardens. Many travelogues described museums as "a type of medical hall," indicating that their understanding of Western science was largely limited to natural history and medicine.

This limited understanding was influenced by the exhibition culture of industrial product fairs and pharmaceutical gatherings held across Japan. These were exhibitions organized by various feudal domains as part of industrial promotion and wealth-building policies, aiming to visually share industrial knowledge. Matsumiya points out that these events were the genesis of "modernization through exhibition" and that Japan's subsequent exposition and museum policies were built on this foundation. Thus, Japanese museums began as instruments for industrial promotion and enlightenment education.

An exception was Fukuzawa Yukichi, who saw museums as symbols of civilization and tools for disseminating knowledge. After inspecting the London International Exhibition of 1862, he understood the exposition as a social mechanism that simultaneously promoted industry and education, and museums as its permanent embodiment. This shows that Japan's museums were conceived early on as "administrative devices inseparable from expositions."

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The museum policy of the new Meiji government was closely tied to its policy of "Enrich the State, Strengthen the Military" (Fukoku Kyōhei) and industrial promotion initiatives. Museums were positioned as places for "instruction by the eye," where technological innovations and the achievements of civilization could be made visible to the populace. Sano Tsunetami and Ōkubo Toshimichi referenced Britain's South Kensington Museum to introduce an exhibition philosophy that combined industrial technology and art education. However, according to Matsumiya, this "South Kensington model" was institutionalized as a state-led policy without fully understanding its private-sector origins. This "misperception" became a catalyst for the early transformation of Japanese museums into state-controlled cultural apparatuses.

This philosophy was institutionally realized by Machida Hisanari (1838–1897), a bureaucrat who had visited the British Museum and the South Kensington Museum. After returning to Japan, he established the Museum Bureau in 1871 and envisioned a comprehensive museum integrating natural history, industry, and art. The following year, the "Ministry of Education Exposition" at Yushima Seidō was the first modern exhibition to feature education, crafts, natural history, and art side-by-side. Fearing the destruction of cultural heritage, Machida also proposed the "Preservation of Old Items," marking the beginning of cultural heritage administration. This brought the two streams of museum and cultural heritage administration together.

During the Second National Industrial Exhibition of 1881, a building designed by Josiah Conder (fig.1) was erected in Ueno and later repurposed as the main museum hall, which opened in 1882. It was placed under the Imperial Household Ministry in 1886 and renamed the "Tokyo Imperial Household Museum" in 1900. As scholars such as Matsumiya have argued, this process reflects the museum's transformation from a "symbol of a civilized nation" to a "symbol of imperial culture." The original concept of a comprehensive museum was reorganized into an imperial-centric one focusing on art, archaeology, and history, thereby functioning as an apparatus to visualize national identity centered on the imperial lineage.

This shift was driven by Kuki Ryūichi (1852–1931), who, drawing on his knowledge of Western art administration, systematized imperial art. Under his direction, the museum began to function as a stage for cultural policy and national ceremonies. This established a dual institutional structure in Japanese museums, combining the "system of academic knowledge" with "state authority." The Imperial Household Museum functioned as a cultural apparatus supporting an imperial-centered nationalism, with exhibitions serving as spaces to visualize national prestige. Machida's "place of comprehensive knowledge" was thus transformed into a "national apparatus centered on the imperial household."

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1

Fig.1: Hiroshige III, Ueno kōen naikoku kangyō daini hakurankai bijutsukan narabini [shojo] funsuiki no zu (Japanese: 上野公園内国勧業第二博覧会美術館ならびに猩々噴水器之図, "Second national industrial exhibition at Ueno Park"). Japanese triptych print showing people gathered at Ueno Park, most of them viewing a fountain with goldfish, 1881.

I.2. The Establishment of Educational Museums and the Renewal by Tanahashi Gentarō

The educational museum is closely tied to the formation of modern Japan's school education system. In 1877, the Ministry of Education's Educational Museum was established at Yushima Seidō in Tokyo. It was initially conceived as an "educational display hall" featuring materials such as teaching aids and models. The exhibition system was organized by subject, symbolizing the dissemination and standardization of the school education system.

However, as compulsory education spread nationwide, the significance of the educational museum temporarily diminished. By the 1890s, it was integrated into the Tokyo Higher Normal School (a central institution for teacher training) as an affiliated facility, and its exhibition activities stagnated. Its renewal began when Tanahashi Gentarō (1869–1961), a science educator, was appointed as its head in 1906. With expertise in both education and natural science, he revamped the exhibitions to be more focused on materials that would aid educational research.

Between 1909 and 1911, under the orders of the Ministry of Education, he studied in Germany and the United States, inspecting Western educational museums and science centers. Upon his return, he sought to popularize scientific knowledge through lectures and traveling exhibitions, transforming the museum from an auxiliary for school education into a hub for social education. In 1912, he established a "Popular Education Hall" within the museum to expand exhibitions for the public, introducing interactive displays such as push-button operations and experimental models to promote scientific understanding.

In 1914, the Educational Museum became independent from the Tokyo Higher Normal School, becoming the "Tokyo Educational Museum" under the direct control of the Ministry of Education. That same year, during the Tokyo Taishō Exposition, the Ministry of Education set up an "Educational and Academic Hall" to showcase achievements in education and science; after the exposition, the building was relocated

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2

to the grounds of Yushima Seidō to serve as a new exhibition hall. This expanded the exhibition space, and the Educational Museum was relaunched as an "educational institution open to society". Tanahashi was appointed director of the museum in 1917.

The Tokyo Educational Museum held social education exhibitions on topics like cholera prevention and livelihood improvement, which linked the dissemination of scientific knowledge with social movements. However, the popularity of these special exhibitions sometimes overshadowed permanent displays and scholarly research, weakening the museum's professional foundation.[4]

In 1921, the museum was renamed the "Tokyo Museum." The Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923 destroyed the building, but after receiving a donation of natural science materials, the rebuilt museum shifted its focus to a specialized science museum. This laid the foundation for the later National Museum of Nature and Science. After his retirement, Tanahashi summarized his findings in the 1930 book *Educational Institutions Appealing to the Eye*, positioning the museum as a "place of education that makes reason known through the eye."[5]

The Tokyo Prefectural Art Museum, which opened in 1926, expanded public access as Japan's first public art museum. However, it began as a rental-hall model without a permanent collection, prioritizing event-based activities over research, preservation, and education. This mode of operation spread to regional museums, promoting the commercialization of exhibitions while also giving rise to a form of urban public culture.

In summary, modern Japanese museums began with expository enlightenment, underwent imperial institutionalization, and were socially re-educated. They faced the challenges of public exhibition limits while forming the institutional foundation of the present day.

Fig. 2:
Tokyo Educational Museum (Past of National Museum of Nature and Science) in 1920.

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II: Tsuruta Sōichirō and the Institutional Foundation of Post-War Museology: The Reintegration of Four Functions Centered on Exhibition

II.1. Post-War Social Education and the Framework of the Museum Act

The post-war Japanese museum system first gained a nationwide legal foundation with the enactment of the Museum Act of 1951. As part of post-war educational reform based on democratic ideals, museums were positioned as social education facilities alongside libraries and community centers.

Article 1 of the Museum Act states that "the purpose of a museum is to collect, preserve, exhibit, and utilize materials for educational purposes." The four functions—collection, preservation, exhibition, and education—demonstrate a structure where all functions converge on education through exhibition. Exhibition is not just a display but is legally positioned as an educational tool that visualizes knowledge through materials and promotes social learning. This reflects both the continuation and renewal of the pre-war enlightenment-oriented view of exhibitions.

Behind this philosophy was a pre-war movement for legal codification, led by Tanahashi Gentarō. He redefined the museum from an auxiliary for school education to a social education institution, repeatedly arguing for a "Museum Ordinance" and founding the Japan Museum Association. His philosophy was inherited by the post-war social education system and is believed to have directly influenced the enactment of the Museum Act.[6]

Nevertheless, the Museum Act was the first law to institutionalize exhibition as an educational tool within the social education legal framework, and it was groundbreaking in its positioning of museums as hubs for social learning. The person who academically systematized this philosophy and reintegrated the four functions around exhibition was Tsuruta Sōichirō. The following section examines how his theory inherited this institutional context and redefined the museum as a "living educational institution."

II.2. The Establishment and Development of Tsuruta Sōichirō's Museology

Tsuruta Sōichirō (1918–1992) was a science-educated bureaucrat and museum scholar who built the theoretical foundation of post-war Japanese museology. He learned at the Tokyo Higher Normal School and Tokyo Bunrika University, later becoming the first professor of museology at Hosei University.

In the Japan Museum Association's 1956 publication, *An Introduction to Museology*, Tsuruta wrote the first section, "Introduction to Museology".[7] This book is considered the starting point of post-war Japanese museology, as it was the first systematic work to theoretically integrate museum practice and education. Tsuruta's theory integrated Tanahashi Gentarō's view of museums as "social education sites" with Kiba Kazuo's theory of museums as "social tools," forming his own system that bridged education and natural science.

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In his "Introduction to Museology" Tsuruta organized the museum's purpose into four functions—"collection," "preservation," "research," and "educational outreach"—locating them relationally. He particularly emphasized "educational outreach," defining the essence of the museum as connecting "things" and "people" through exhibitions. Tsuruta called this philosophy "functionalist museology," perceiving the museum as a dynamic functional system. He also viewed the museum's components as a trinity of "things (materials)," "place (facilities)," and "work (people)," defining a "living museum" as one where these elements interact organically.

The curator (gakugeiin, a comprehensive museum professional in Japan) was positioned at its core as both an educator and a researcher. Tsuruta pointed out that the "lack of research function" among Japanese curators was the biggest problem. He criticized the generalist approach common in post-war museums and proposed a "comprehensive curatorial profession" that would balance a specialized division of labor with organic collaboration. Here, "comprehensive" meant a collaborative professional system where research serves as the core that connects to education and exhibition.

In Chapter 4, he clarified the significance of exhibitions as an educational act that reconstructs the meaning of materials to guide the understanding of visitors. Hiramatsu Saeko and Shimizu Shū see this as the core of Tsuruta's theory, confirming his position that "the museum lives through the activities of people."[8]

In Chapter 5, "Museum Management," Tsuruta distinguished between the "museum as an individual" and "museums as a collective". For the former, he positioned the director as a manager of human resources, calling them a "fatherly figure". For the latter, he proposed the concept of a "cluster of museums," where multiple institutions collaborate to demonstrate their educational and social functions for an entire region.[9] This idea is considered a precursor to later theories of social museums and the concept of ecomuseums.

Yokoyama Emi positions "Introduction to Museology" as the theoretical foundation of post-war museology but notes that Tsuruta himself considered the book unfinished and later envisioned a new "systematic museology".[10] According to Yokoyama, Tsuruta's theory, while closely tied to the educational policies of his time and having a sense of institutional and practical reality, also contained a strong critical awareness of the Japanese museum world.

From the 1970s onward, Tsuruta actively participated in the International Council of Museums (ICOM) and, feeling the limitations of the Japanese museum system, began publishing papers in English abroad. He criticized the administrative rigidity and immaturity of the curatorial system in Japan, advocating for a rebuilding of professionalism. Yokoyama positions Tsuruta's proposal to create a "comprehensive curatorial profession" that would integrate "material specialists," "education specialists," and "technical specialists" as a critical suggestion in response to the institutional short-

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comings of the time. Furthermore, based on his ICOM experiences, he introduced new concepts such as ecomuseums and fragmented museums, arguing for the necessity of transforming Japanese museums from "building-centered" to "social and environmental practice".

II.3. Re-evaluating Tsuruta's Theory in Post-War Museology

Tsuruta Sōichirō's museology not only functioned institutionally but also formed the theoretical backbone of post-war Japanese museology. Analyses by Inuzuka Yasuhiro and Kaneko Atsushi are particularly representative of this re-evaluation.

Inuzuka positions Tsuruta as the "nexus of institutionalization and theorization."[11] He praises Tsuruta for providing a theoretical basis for the museum as a social education facility as defined by the Museum Act, but also critically notes that his system tended to serve the institution. Inuzuka's assessment is that there is a coexistence of both the achievement of ordering theory within the language of the institution and the delayed autonomy of the discipline due to institutional dependence.

In contrast, Kaneko positions Tsuruta as the sole ideologue who established post-war Japanese museology as an "autonomous theoretical system."[12] Kaneko finds originality in Tsuruta's development of Kiba Kazuo's concept of the "museum as a social tool" into a system of "internal harmony" that integrates the museum's various functions. Tsuruta's "functionalist museology" is thus praised as the first system to autonomously theorize the functional structure of the museum. Kaneko further re-evaluates Itō Toshirō's critique of Tsuruta not as a simple conflict but as a theoretical dialogue. Itō critically inherited "functionalist museology" and developed it in the direction of social relational theory and external network theory, but his theoretical foundation lay in Tsuruta's work. His theory still holds theoretical significance as a framework that illuminates current discussions on the publicness, professionalism, and social nature of museums.

III: Itō Toshirō and the Development of Community Museology: The Space for Social Learning through Exhibition and Participation

III.1. Itō Toshirō and the Three-Generation Model

From the 1970s onward, as post-war social education matured, museums began to be redefined from "devices for knowledge transmission" to "places for community learning." This shift was theoretically guided by Itō Toshirō (1946–1991), who re-conceptualized museums from the perspective of pedagogy and social education.

Itō built upon Tsuruta Sōichirō's functionalist museology but introduced the methodology of social education theory to view museums as agents of social change. His final conclusions are presented in his 1986 paper and his posthumous work, *Open Up, Museums!*. The latter, published in the year of his sudden passing, is considered his intellectual testament.

According to Kuriyama Kiwamu, Itō had already established a perspec-

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tive of "reinterpreting the four functions of the museum as social activities" in the late 1960s.[13] This early awareness became the origin of his later theory of community museums.

Itō organized the development of post-war Japanese museums into a "three-generation model":

(1) The "state-led, institution-building generation" of the post-war recovery period (1950s–60s).

(2) The "social education generation" (1970s).

(3) The "community generation," based on museum activities led by community agents (1980s onward).

This was a description of the shift in the social function of museums from "administration" to "education," and finally to "citizens." Itō also interpreted this change as a transformation in exhibition philosophy, redefining exhibitions from "authoritative presentation" to "social dialogue." For Itō, a museum was a "place where community residents re-create their own culture through learning," conceived as a more advanced "participatory public facility" than conventional social education centers. Exhibitions were a dialogical medium for sharing community issues and promoting collaboration.

III.2. The Connection to Social Education Theory and the Redefinition of Exhibition

A key feature of Itō's argument is that he not only viewed the museum as a site for social education but also theorized it as a "cultural apparatus that mediates social learning." Exhibitions were not a static device for one-way knowledge transfer but a social act through which citizens could proactively learn about local culture and issues. Exhibitions were redefined not as "storage" but as "communication"—a "process-oriented educational activity" co-created by curators and residents.

Inuzuka Yasuhiro praises Itō for "reintegrating the three functions of exhibition, education, and research into social education practice," calling it the "publicization of the educational act."[14] This is the vision of museum activities transforming into a space for public discourse through exhibitions. Itō linked this transformation to the concept of "citizens' right to learn" (gakushū-ken, a fundamental concept in Japanese social education inspired by international movements toward lifelong learning), positioning exhibitions as a specific guarantee of that right.

By introducing the philosophy of the right to learn, exhibitions shifted from "authoritative knowledge presentation" to "the generation of knowledge by citizens." The subject of the exhibition shifted from the curator to the residents, or to the collaboration between the two, and the museum gained meaning as a device for social dialogue. For Itō, an exhibition was the very process of visualizing and sharing the "structure of learning" within the community.

Itō's community museum model presupposes a relationship of "co-learning" (learning together) between curators and residents, fluidifying the boundary between professionals and citizens. This perspective, which views museum activities themselves as a "social learning process," also connects to

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later trends such as Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) and constructivist educational theories.

III.3. Itō's Legacy and Contemporary Significance

Even after his death, Itō Toshirō's theory continues to be re-evaluated. His concepts of "community learning," "collaboration," and "co-creation" resonate with cultural policies from the 2000s onward, especially the trend toward emphasizing citizen participation and cultural inclusion.

Inuzuka Yasuhiro calls Itō the "completor of social education-oriented museology in Japan," while pointing out that his theory was not fully reflected in institutional reforms and curator training systems.[15] For him, Itō was the person who translated Tsuruta Sōichirō's system to the practical level of the community and reintegrated the three functions of exhibition, education, and research as social education acts.

Meanwhile, Yamamoto Tetsuya regards Itō as a "symbol of the social education turn that transformed the discourse of post-war museology," positioning him as a theorist who opened up the museum from an administrative institution to a citizen-led practice.[16] Kaneko Atsushi re-reads Itō from the perspective of recent cultural policy studies, positioning his "Open Up, Museums" theory as a precursor to today's "co-creation museums" and "forum-type exhibitions." According to Kaneko, Itō's emphasis on "exhibition as a place for social dialogue" should be re-evaluated as the theoretical starting point for citizen-participatory exhibitions and community co-creation.[17]

The theoretical legacy of Itō lies in his shift in exhibition philosophy from "knowledge presentation" to "the medium of social learning." Exhibitions were conceived as an educational act for citizens to collaborate, share, and reconstruct community issues. This view of exhibitions anticipates recent trends such as forum-type museology and co-creation exhibitions, providing a theoretical foundation for redefining the museum as a "device for public discourse."

IV: Repositioning Museology: Towards the Integration of Institutions, Philosophy, and Professionalism

IV.1. Constructivist Exhibitions and the Museum as a Forum

The revised Museum Act includes cultural tourism as part of museum activities, encouraging institutions to collaborate with local stakeholders to promote regional vitality through cultural engagement. However, the philosophical deepening of exhibitions—the shift to constructivist exhibitions—has not yet fully progressed in Japan. A pioneer in this area is the "Gallery of Time" at the Louvre-Lens (2012), where transnational exhibitions are designed to encourage visitors to make their own comparisons and construct historical relationships. Exhibitions thus function as a device to facilitate "the construction of thought and memory" rather than "the transmission of knowledge."

The philosophy of the "museum as a forum" advocated by Itō Toshirō theoretically intersects with Duncan F.

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Cameron's "The Museum: A Temple or the Forum?" (1971).[18] Cameron argued that museums should be transformed from a "Temple" to a "Forum"—a place for social discourse and creation. Yoshida Kenji inherits this vision, redefining the museum as a "cultural apparatus that mediates society's self-reflection."[19] The exhibition space becomes a public stage for reconstructing fragmented memories and for people from different backgrounds to converse.

The museum as a forum is a cultural institution for mediating social dialogue and reconciling values. However, in Japan, exhibitions on "negative histories" such as war and colonialism have been constrained by political and emotional pressures, with "neutrality" being equated with "non-conflict." In light of Cameron's theory, this avoidance leads to the stagnation of public culture. An exhibition should not seek consensus but be a place for society to reflect on itself amidst the intersection of different perspectives. As Yoshida argues, the museum must be a "device for social discourse" and a space where silenced memories can be voiced once again.

Constructivist educational philosophy is a learner-centered approach that builds meaning through dialogue. A practical example is VTS (Visual Thinking Strategies). Developed by Abigail Housen and Philip Yenawaine, VTS nurtures observation skills and critical thinking by having viewers share "what they see," "why they think that," and "where they find evidence." The curator is no longer a knowledge transmitter but a facilitator who mediates questions, and exhibitions shift from "knowledge sharing" to "meaning co-creation."

IV.2. Institutional and Operational Challenges for Japanese Museums

The supplementary resolutions accompanying the 2023 Museum Act revision explicitly point out the lack of legally prescribed qualifications for museum directors. Article 4 states that "the role of the museum director, who has sufficient insight, is important" and calls for "the appointment of curators with advanced and specialized knowledge and the enrichment of their training." In Japan, it is common for administrative officials to be appointed as directors, which has created a disconnect with curatorial staff. The resolutions aim to rectify this structure, moving toward a framework where the director is positioned as a professional who integrates education, research, and cultural management.

Under the current system, major special exhibitions are often funded by media corporations, which act as sponsors. Koga Futoshi's book *The Inconvenient Truth of Art Exhibitions* (2020) calls this an "unhealthy codependency," revealing the reality of museums being incorporated into the entertainment business of corporate capital. Koga emphasizes that collection exhibitions are the true purpose of a museum, advocating for financial independence and ensuring the authority of professional judgment.[20]

Furthermore, a 2023 statement by the Science Council of Japan noted that national museums are exempt from the law, that the registration system and the professional system

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are disconnected, and that the curatorial research function is undervalued.[21] These issues, in light of Tanahashi Gentarō's philosophy, Tsuruta Sōichirō's functionalist system, and Itō Toshirō's community theory, highlight the need to reconstruct institutions, philosophy, and professionalism as a unified trinity.

Additionally, it is crucial to establish an intermediary professional role to actualize the "promotion of collaboration" stated in the revised Act. Liaison and coordinating professionals (e.g., Certified Social Education Specialists) would serve as a bridge to related fields such as education, welfare, and tourism. By institutionally arranging a triangular structure of "general affairs—liaison—curatorial," governance can become more transparent and sustainable.

IV.3. Repositioning Museology

From the educational museums of the Meiji period to community museology, Japanese museology has developed into a "discipline of public dialogue and co-creation." The "curator as a mediator" envisioned by Itō Toshirō was a practitioner of co-learning and empathy in the community. This philosophy has been inherited by today's "museum as a forum" theory and has evolved into a philosophy of "co-creation"—the collaborative construction of knowledge.

Based on this analysis, four key directions are proposed:

- Repositioning Institutions: Establish a unified legal framework, including for national museums, and secure the professional system and research foundation for directors and curators.
- Repositioning Philosophy: Conceptualize exhibitions as forums to share social memories, including negative histories.
- Repositioning Finance and Professionalism: Shift away from media dependency and build autonomous cultural management centered on collections.
- Repositioning Personnel: Cultivate and deploy liaison personnel who complement directors and curators, taking on roles of collaboration and coordination.

Through this four-pronged repositioning, the museum will be reborn not as a mere educational or tourist facility but as a forum of knowledge for society to reflect upon itself. Integrating the philosophies of Tanahashi's "education that appeals to the eye," Tsuruta's "living museum," Itō's "open up, museums!," and Cameron/Yoshida's "forum theory" and reconstructing each layer of institutions, philosophy, professionalism, and personnel is the task for museology in the 21st century.

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Endnotes:

1 Ito 1986; 1991.
2 See Yajima 2009.
3 See Hamada 2010.
4 See Kubouchi 1996.
5 Tanahashi 1930.
6 See Handa 2021.
7 Tsuruta 1956.
8 Hiramatsu 2010; Shimizu 2010.
9 Hashiba 2010.
10 Yokoyama 2010.
11 Inuzuka 2009.
12 Kaneko 2010.
13 See Kuriyama 2012; 2019.
14 Inuzuka 2008.
15 Inuzuka 2008.
16 Yamamoto 2011.
17 Kaneko 2010.
18 Cameron 1971.
19 Yoshida 2013.
20 Koga 2020.
21 Science Council of Japan 2023.

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Patronage, Industry, and Institution: A Genealogy of Privately Funded Museums and Contemporary Art in Japan

Mami Kataoka

Keywords:
Private museums; Philanthropy and patronage; Contemporary art and museums in Japan; Institutional sustainability; Modernization and cultural infrastructure

ABSTRACT:

In the history of museum development in Japan, privately funded museums have played a crucial role. Following the Meiji Restoration, Japan's modernization under slogans such as «enrich the country and strengthen the military» and «leave Asia and join Europe» prompted many businesspeople to contribute to internationalization by introducing Western art. The Matsukata Collection and the Ohara Museum of Art (1930–) are representative examples. After World War II, Japan's cultural relationship with Europe and the United States gradually shifted from acceptance to exchange, with private museums reflecting economic power and individual vision playing a major role. Examples include the Bridgestone Museum of Art (1952–, now the Artizon Museum), the Seibu Museum of Art / SEZON Museum of Art (1975–1999), and the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art (1979–2021). Since the 1990s, privately funded museums maintaining a strong international outlook while engaging in regional revitalization have emerged. The Benesse House Museum (1992–) and related Seto Inland Sea art projects, along with the Mori Art Museum (2003) in Tokyo, represent this generation. This paper provides an overview of private museum development in Japan from the perspectives of changes in industrial structure, the balance between political and economic power, and the development of public museums. It will also examine examples of the rapidly increasing number of privately funded museums in the Asian region.

Nella storia dello sviluppo dei musei in Giappone, i musei finanziati privatamente hanno svolto un ruolo cruciale. Dopo la Restaurazione Meiji, il processo di modernizzazione del Giappone, guidato da slogan come "arricchire il paese e rafforzare l'esercito" e "lasciare l'Asia e unirsi all'Europa", spinse molti imprenditori a contribuire all'internazionalizzazione introducendo l'arte occidentale. La Collezione Matsukata e l'Ohara Museum of Art (1930–) sono esempi rappresentativi di questo fenomeno. Dopo la Seconda guerra mondiale, il rapporto culturale del Giappone con l'Europa e gli Stati Uniti passò gradualmente da una fase di semplice ricezione a una di scambio reciproco. In questo contesto, i musei privati, che riflettevano la forza economica e la visione individuale dei loro fondatori, svolsero un ruolo di primo piano. Tra gli esempi si possono citare il Bridgestone Museum of Art (1952–, oggi Artizon Museum), il Seibu Museum of Art / SEZON Museum of Art (1975–1999) e l'Hara Museum of Contemporary Art (1979–2021). A partire dagli anni Novanta sono emersi musei privati capaci di mantenere un forte carattere internazionale, contribuendo al contempo alla rivitalizzazione delle regioni locali. Il Benesse House Museum (1992–) e i progetti artistici collegati nel Mare Interno di Seto, insieme al Mori Art Museum (2003) a Tokyo, rappresentano questa nuova generazione. Questo articolo offre una panoramica dello sviluppo dei musei privati in Giappone alla luce dei cambiamenti nella struttura industriale, degli equilibri tra potere politico ed economico e dello sviluppo dei musei pubblici. Inoltre, esaminerà esempi del rapido aumento di musei finanziati privatamente nella regione asiatica.

Mami Kataoka

Mami Kataoka is Director of the Mori Art Museum. She joined the museum in 2003 and became Director in 2020. She also serves as Director of the National Center for Art Research (since 2023) and ICA Kyoto (since 2025). Internationally, she has held several key positions, including International Curator at the Hayward Gallery in London (2007–2009), Co-Artistic Director of the 9th Gwangju Biennale (2012), Artistic Director of the 21st Biennale of Sydney (2018), and Artistic Director of Aichi Triennale 2022. She served as a board member of CIMAM (2014–2022) and as its President (2020–2022). At the Mori Art Museum, she has curated mid-career surveys of Asian artists including Tsuyoshi Ozawa (2004), Ai Weiwei (2009), Lee Bul (2012), Makoto Aida (2012), Lee Mingwei (2014), NS Harsha (2017), and Chiharu Shiota (2019). She has also co-curated regional exhibitions such as SUNSHOWER: Contemporary Art from Southeast Asia 1980s to Now (2017) and Roppongi Crossing in 2004 and 2013.

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Regardless of whether a museum's funding comes from public or private sources, its activities are inherently open to society and thus public in nature. However, when considering the public nature of museums, it is not uncommon to assume that their operating entities are funded by public sources. In Japan, of the current 419 regular member museums of the Japanese Council of Art Museums, 255 are national or public museums, while private museums account for 144, approximately one-third.[1] Historically, when examining museums that have collected and exhibited contemporary art in particular, we find that museums operated by individual and private funds have played a major role. The term "contemporary art" in this paper refers to art of its own time in terms of collection and exhibition, which naturally includes periods that are now considered "modern." In fact, this model of privately funded contemporary art museums has much in common with the establishment of major museums in the United States such as the Museum of Modern Art, New York (MoMA) and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and when compared with the many contemporary art museums established in recent years in economically developing regions around the world, including Asia, we can observe fascinating resonances that transcend time and place.

This paper traces the genealogy of private museums in Japan, focusing primarily on those that have emphasized the collection and exhibition of contemporary art since the introduction of the concept of museums after modernization, with particular attention to the individuals who led these initiatives. In doing so, we will discover the presence of distinguished individuals who possessed both a clear vision—viewing Japan from a broad perspective, positioning it within the larger world map, bringing world art to Japanese artists and society, or bringing new creative energy to regions through art—and the ability to act on that vision. At the same time, for private museums, the sustainability of operations and how the founder's vision can be passed on across generations remain the greatest challenges. What should be changed and what should be preserved while responding to changes in the times? This is where private museums differ significantly from public museums, which are premised on continuity. In reality, many private museums have made significant contributions during specific periods, though not all of them have necessarily continued. While there are already multiple publications on individual cases, conveying the visions, actions, and resulting social contributions of these pioneers raises critical questions for us today: how can wealth generated in our contemporary era—with its vastly different industrial and economic structures from the 20th century—be meaningfully returned to society and the future?

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I: Modernization, Industrialization, and Westernization after the Meiji Restoration

After more than 200 years of sakoku—a policy of national isolation under the Tokugawa shogunate that severely restricted foreign trade and contact to designated ports while prohibiting Japanese citizens from traveling abroad—Japan established the Meiji government centered on the Emperor, replacing rule by samurai, in 1868. New policies for a modern nation were implemented, including the abolition of feudal domains, land tax reform, and the elimination of the class system. At that time, the First Industrial Revolution was nearly complete in Europe, and the great powers had achieved industrialization. For the Meiji government, modernization and internationalization (Westernization) policies were urgent matters, and Japan officially participated in the Vienna World Exposition for the first time in 1873. The German word *Kunstgewerbe* in the exhibition's submission regulations was translated as *bijutsu* (fine arts: in the West, music, painting, the art of making images, poetry, etc. are called fine arts), which is widely known as the beginning of the term *bijutsu* in Japan. Prior to participating in the Vienna World Exposition, the Museum Bureau of the Ministry of Education held the first exposition at Yushima Seido Taiseiden in 1872, which is currently considered the founding and opening year of the Tokyo National Museum. Politician Tsunetami Sano, who served as Vice President at the Exposition Bureau, appealed in his 1875 Vienna World Exposition report submitted to the government for the necessity of building a full-scale modern art museum. The National Museum opened at its current location in Ueno in 1882.

From the 1870s to 1880s, policies to promote industry were actively pursued, and government-operated enterprises for modern nation-building gradually transitioned to private-led industrial development. Industries such as textiles, railways, mining, shipbuilding, and steel manufacturing showed remarkable development. Therefore, we can see the wealth gained from these new industries in the background of private museums established from the Meiji period [1868-1912] through Taisho [1912-1926] to early Showa [1926-1989]. Although there is insufficient space to discuss it in detail, in terms of private funding, the role that department stores played as exhibition venues parallel to the development of art museums cannot be ignored. In 1904, Mitsukoshi's 'Korin Heritage Exhibition' became the first exhibition held at a department store, and in 1909, department stores in Osaka and Kyoto also became exhibition venues.[2] This would lead to the prosperity of department store art museums in the latter half of the 20th century.

For contextualization, this chapter includes not only museums focused on contemporary art of their time, but also the Okura Museum of Art, which opened in the early 20th century when the very concept of an art museum was new and is positioned as Japan's oldest existing private art museum. It also includes the case of an individual who donated funds for the construction of a public art museum to Tokyo Prefecture at a time when there were no public art museums.

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Kihachiro Okura (Okura Museum of Art)

Okura Museum of Art in Minato-ku, Tokyo, is the oldest existing private museum in Japan. Businessman Kihachiro Okura [1837-1928] opened the Okura Museum of Art in 1902 on the grounds of his residence in Akasaka, and later donated the land, building, maintenance fund, and cultural properties to the Okura Museum of Art Foundation established in 1917. However, the building and exhibited collection were destroyed by fire in the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923. The current Okura Museum of Art was built as a new exhibition hall designed by Chuta Ito in 1928. Kihachiro's son, Kishichiro Okura [1882-1963], also inherited the museum's management and contributed to collecting and donating works himself.

Kihachiro Okura was born at the end of the Edo period in what is now Niigata Prefecture and moved to Tokyo at age 17. A gun shop he opened in 1867 succeeded due to demand from the Boshin War, and he made his fortune. He subsequently established the Okura-Gumi Shokai, took on construction projects such as Rokumeikan, Imperial Hotel, and Kabukiza through the construction department that would become Taisei Corporation, and built the Okura zaibatsu / Okura financial clique from scratch through diverse industries. The wealth gained from his business was channeled into the Okura Museum of Art, along with educational projects such as school construction and welfare projects such as hospital establishment. What motivated him was not for himself, but a sense of mission to prevent the *Haibutsu Kisyaku* (a movement to abolish Buddhist artifacts) and the overseas outflow of cultural properties after the Meiji Restoration, and to protect and preserve them within Japan. The Okura Museum of Art collection began with Japanese and Asian ancient art, with Japanese modern paintings added during Okura Kishichiro's era. It houses about 2,500 works of art and crafts, including 60 National Treasures, Important Cultural Properties, and Important Art Objects. Although not a contemporary art museum, which is the focus of this paper, I would first like to cite it as an example that has continued for the long period of 123 years through incorporation as a public interest incorporated foundation in 2011 and expansion in 2019, spanning generations.

Kojiro Matsukata (The Matsukata Collection)

Kojiro Matsukata [1866-1950] became the first president of Kawasaki Shipbuilding Corporation at age 30 in 1896. With the outbreak of World War I, the shipbuilding industry boomed, and he earned enormous profits from destroyers, submarines, and merchant ships. Matsukata stayed in London for about two years and eight months from 1916 to sell vessels, and it was here that his art collection began. He continued collecting during three trips to Europe over more than ten years (including the one began in 1916), ultimately conceiving the idea of building an art museum in Japan. This stemmed from his desire to introduce Western art to Japan, a country in the midst of modernization. According to Matsukata's younger brother, Saburo Matsukata, Kojiro said:

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> *Japan is a poor country, yet its poor artists must force themselves to go to Paris to have direct contact with Western art. That's why I buy lots of paintings and sculptures to show everyone.*[3]

Kojiro was born in Kagoshima Prefecture as the third son of Masayoshi Matsukata, a Meiji-era politician who served as Prime Minister. Kojiro studied in the United States as a student. Due to the influence he received from his father and the historical context, Kojiro was said to be a businessman who thought about the national interest.[4] Art historian Yukio Yashiro met Matsukata in 1921 and often acted together with him. When Yashiro accompanied Matsukata to visit the home of artist Frank Brangwyn [1867-1956] in London,

> *there was a fairly large model of the Matsukata Museum of Art made of plaster. Matsukata named it the Kyoraku Museum of Art and intended to build it on a hilltop in Azabu, Tokyo. I knew this because a stake with the sign 'Kyoraku Museum of Art Site' was already standing near the top of Sendaizaka.*[5]

Brangwyn was an artist Matsukata met early in his collecting and a person who influenced the formation of his collection. Yashiro also accompanied Matsukata when he visited the elderly Monet in Giverny. From 1922 onwards, exhibitions to publicly display the Matsukata Collection were held multiple times in Japan.

Subsequently, due to the bankruptcy of the Fifteenth Bank in 1926 and the Great Depression of 1929, Kawasaki Shipbuilding Corporation also incurred significant debt, and Matsukata's economic situation changed dramatically. From 1928 to 1940, the Matsukata Collection that had already been sent to Japan was sold through more than ten exhibitions and dispersed domestically and internationally.[6] Meanwhile, the ukiyo-e collection of about 8,000 works was gifted to the Imperial Household in 1938 and later housed in the Imperial Museum (now the Tokyo National Museum). It appears that there were works that could not be imported due to 100% tariffs. The works stored in London were destroyed in a fire in 1939. On the other hand, works stored in France were confiscated by the French government as enemy property after World War II. In 1951, at the time of the signing of the San Francisco Peace Treaty, there was a meeting between Prime Minister Yoshida and French Foreign Minister Schuman regarding the return of the Matsukata Collection. Through the France and Japan Cultural Agreement concluded in 1953, 308 paintings, 62 sculptures, and 5 books, totaling 375 items, were returned, and the National Museum of Western Art was built for it, then opened in 1959 as a storage and exhibition facility. Although Kojiro Matsukata's individual vision did not materialize as the "Kyoraku Museum of Art", it can be said to have been achieved in the form of making a great contribution to the artistic experience in Japan through the former Matsukata Collection being collected in multiple museums, including the National Museum of Western Art and the To-

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kyo National Museum.

Keitaro Sato (Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum)

In 1926, the Tokyo Prefectural Art Museum (now the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum) opened as the first public art museum in Japan. Nearly 60 years had passed since the Meiji era began. However, this museum had no collection and was mainly used as a venue for annual group exhibitions such as *Bunten*, *Inten*, and *Nikaten*. The person who contributed to the realization of this museum was Keitaro Sato [1868-1940], a coal merchant from northern Kyushu. Born in Fukuoka, Sato studied law in Tokyo and returned to his hometown to start a coal business. After the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05), coal demand surged, and he began managing coal mines, earning the nickname "God of Coal". He respected American steel magnate Andrew Carnegie and focused on charitable works after age 50. In 1921, while on a business trip to Tokyo, he happened to see an editorial titled *Permanent Art Museum* published in Jiji Shimpo newspaper. It stated, "Major cities in Western countries have permanent art museums representing their national culture and art, but Japan only has temporary art museums built for each exhibition".[7] Sato immediately visited Tokyo Governor Hiroshi Abe and donated the entire construction cost of about 1 million yen (at the time, equivalent to half of his total assets). His motto was "Public and private are one". The Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum opened five years later in 1926 and was called the "Palace of Beauty" until the current new building was created in 1975, becoming a venue for countless artists. It functioned also as a historically crucial venue where a number of experimental exhibitions emerged, including the "Japan Independent Exhibition (Yomiuri Independent Exhibition)" held from 1949 to 1963, and the renown "10th Tokyo Biennale" in 1970 as well as other editions of the Tokyo Biennales organized by the Mainichi Shimbun. It is worth remembering that the realization of this first public art museum was made possible by the will of a single individual.

Magosaburo Ohara and Soichiro Ohara (Ohara Museum of Art)

Magosaburo Ohara [1880-1943] was born as the third son of Kohshiro Ohara, who served as the first president of Kurashiki Spinning Mill and president of Kurashiki Bank, and was also a major landowner in the city of Kurashiki. Magosaburo Ohara inherited the family estate at age 24 and became the seventh head of the Ohara family. In 1926, he established Kurashiki Kenshoku Co., Ltd and later proceeded with the development of synthetic rayon. He also made significant contributions to establishing the infrastructure, hospitals, and scientific research institutes for the Kurashiki area.

The Ohara Museum of Art began with the relationship between Ohara and Torajiro Kojima [1881-1929]. In 1902, Ohara first met Kojima during an interview for the Ohara Scholarship Program, a student support program by the Ohara family, and continued to support him throughout his life. Ohara provided funding for Kojima's travels to Europe twice, in 1907 and 1919. During his second stay, Kojima thought, "I am fortunate to be able to see masterpieces

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in their original locations with Magosaburo's support, but people studying in Japan have almost no opportunity to see first-class Western paintings", and conveyed his desire to purchase paintings to Ohara.[8] Kojima purchased 27 paintings by 18 artists, including Monet's *Waterlilies* and Matisse's *Portrait of Mademoiselle Matisse*, and returned to Japan in 1921.[9] Many works by contemporary artists of that time were included. The collected works were exhibited publicly three times in Kurashiki City by 1923. Audiences rushed from Tokyo and Osaka. During this time, the idea of establishing a museum was born, and Kojima made a third trip to Europe in 1922 with museum collection in mind. However, during the process of establishing the museum, he died prematurely of a cerebral hemorrhage in 1929. This prompted Ohara to decide to realize the Museum soon. The Ohara Museum of Art opened in 1930 as the first museum in Japan to collect and exhibit primarily Western art, and subsequently came to broadly support diverse genres of art including Japanese art, ceramics, and *Mingei*.

Soichiro Ohara [1909-1968], son of Magosaburo Ohara, became a foundation trustee when the Ohara Museum of Art was incorporated as foundation in 1935. From 1936 to 1938, Soichiro stayed in Europe for an extended period before World War II began, and after returning became president of Kurashiki Kenshoku Co., Ltd in 1939 and president of Kurabo Industries Ltd. in 1941. As Japan proceeded toward war, Soichiro evacuated the main collection of the Ohara Museum of Art, which escaped air raids.

II: From the Resumption of Postwar International Exchange to High Economic Growth and Its End

After Japan's defeat in World War II, for about 6 years and 8 months until the San Francisco Peace Treaty took effect in 1952, Japan was occupied by Allied forces under GHQ guidance, and demilitarization and democratization advanced. As the 1956 Economic White Paper stated, "It is no longer the postwar period," postwar reconstruction and economic recovery progressed rapidly, and high economic growth continued until the 1970s. The subsequent bubble economy in the 80s and its collapse also had a significant impact on museums.

In 1947, the Nihon Bijutsukai [Japan Art Association] established the *Japan Independent Exhibition*, and in 1949, Yomiuri Shimbun also founded the *Japan Independent Exhibition* (later renamed as the Yomiuri Independent Exhibition). In 1950, Yomiuri Shimbun held the *World Contemporary Art Exhibition* gathering modern art from Western countries at Takashimaya Department Store. In 1951, Yomiuri Shimbun held the *Henri Matisse Exhibition* in Tokyo, Osaka then at Ohara Museum, and Mainichi Shimbun held the *Japan-France Exchange Contemporary French Art Exhibition Salon de Mai*. That same year, the Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura opened as Japan's first public modern art museum. In January 1952, the Bridgestone Museum of Art opened, followed by the National Museum of Modern Art in December. From this year, Japan also began officially participating in the Venice Biennale. In the January 1955 issue of *Bijutsu*

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Techo, critic Takachiyo Uemura stated, "International exchange in postwar Japanese art has progressed on an unprecedented scale and depth, rapidly changing the state of contemporary art in Japan. [...] Liberation from militarism through defeat strongly accelerated the reaction to this suffocating state over several years".[10]

Soichiro Ohara (The Ohara Museum of Art in postwar era)

In 1950, the Ohara Museum of Art celebrated its 20th anniversary. Soichiro Ohara thought, "Simply protecting the museum I inherited from my father is nothing more than being a kind of grave keeper; when my era comes, adding new things would be in line with my father's will," and began reforming the museum.[11] In 1951, he promptly held exhibitions of Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso, displaying Impressionist and École de Paris works alongside the permanent collection. This marked the museum's opening to contemporary art. The philosophy regarding the social role of the museum can be seen in Soichiro Ohara's words: "Art must be given the opportunity to be accessible to everyone. I think it is not good if individual ownership results in depriving many people of that opportunity".[12] In 1961, a new Annex building was constructed and Japanese modern and contemporary paintings selected by Soichiro himself were exhibited. Many abstract paintings were included. At the time, he had Kusuo Shimizu of Tokyo's Minami Gallery collect contemporary art from Japan and abroad, which he purchased. Taro Inoue, who wrote about him, stated: "Soichiro had Shimizu collect contemporary art that most collectors at the time paid little attention to, and purchased it one after another based on his own judgment. These works form the core of the Ohara Museum of Art's contemporary art collection and have been introduced in many art books, continuing to this day".[13]

The museum collected and exhibited works not only of contemporary art but also of leading *Mingei* (folk craft movement) artists such as Shoji Hamada, Bernard Leach, Kanjiro Kawai, and Shiko Munakata along with Eastern antiquities, establishing Crafts and Oriental Art Gallery. In 1972, the Torajiro Kojima Memorial Hall was opened. As the museum approaches its 100th anniversary since opening, the Ohara Museum of Art can be said to be a unique presence that has inherited the vision of its founding by remaining deeply rooted in Kurashiki as a comprehensive private museum where one can learn about streams of art across East and West and the history of folk crafts while continuing to support contemporary art.

Shojiro Ishibashi (Bridgestone Museum of Art / Artizon Museum)

In January 1952, the year Japan regained sovereignty, the Bridgestone Museum of Art opened in Kyobashi, near Tokyo Station. Founder Shojiro Ishibashi [1889-1976] was born in Kurume City, Fukuoka Prefecture, and took over the family tailoring business. In 1923, he succeeded with the sale of tabi (split-toe socks), and in 1931 established Bridgestone Tire Co., Ltd. with the aim of manufacturing tires domestically. In 1937, he moved the headquarters to Tokyo. He began collecting art-

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works during his Kurume days. After Hanjiro Sakamoto [1882-1969], Ishibashi's elementary school drawing teacher, returned from Paris, they reunited in Kurume. Ishibashi was recommended to buy works by Shigeru Aoki [1882-1911], also from Kurume, who died young. Then Ishibashi started to collect works by Hanjiro Sakamoto, and after moving to Tokyo, met Takeji Fujishima [1867-1943] and collected his works as well.

Shojiro Ishibashi's collection expanded from Japanese modern Western-style painting to Western art during and after the war. "The collections built up by this group of wealthy capitalists in the pre-war period disintegrated in the blink of an eye immediately after the war".[14] "From the end of the war in August 1945 until the opening of the Bridgestone Museum of Art in January 1952, Shojiro built up a collection of over fifty works of western art".[15] When he visited the United States after the war, he toured museums at the Harvard University and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and this experience led to the realization of opening the museum. He deepened his relationship with art historian Inou Dan [1892-1973], and in 1950 formed a group of experts, including Soichi Tominaga, Atsuo Imaizumi, and Shinichi Tani. The Bridgestone's main office building in Kyobashi, Tokyo, which had been destroyed by war, was decided to be rebuilt in 1949, and Ishibashi placed the Bridgestone Museum of Art on the second floor of the new Bridgestone Building completed in 1952. In April 1956, the Ishibashi Foundation was established with Bridgestone Tire stock and land in Kyobashi as initial endowments, and in 1961, Shojiro himself donated many artworks he owned.

Shojiro Ishibashi's contributions to the Japanese art world and museum community extend beyond the Bridgestone Museum of Art. While the Japanese government officially participated in the Venice Biennale in 1952, it lacked the funds to construct a Japanese pavilion on the land offered by the Italian government in the Giardini. Ishibashi donated 20 million yen (the value at the time), and exhibitions have been held in the Japanese pavilion since 1956.

Furthermore, in 1969, he donated the entire construction cost for the relocation of the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo from Kyobashi to Takebashi. The Ishibashi Foundation has also conducted donation and grant program for artistic, cultural, and educational activities in addition to museum operations. It is no exaggeration to say that Shojiro Ishibashi made the greatest contribution to Japan's museum community throughout the 20th century onwards.

In 2015, the Ishibashi Foundation Art Research Center was established in Machida City, Tokyo, to conduct research on artworks, conservation and restoration, and storage of materials. In 2020, after 68 years since its opening in January 1952, the Bridgestone Museum of Art was newly opened as the Artizon Museum in the lower floors of Museum Tower Kyobashi. Observing their various activities and their commitment to changing the long-beloved museum name, it is evident that the founder's vision endures and will continue for years to come.

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Jukichi Komagata (Nagaoka Museum of Contemporary Art / Taiko Collection)

In August 1964, the Nagaoka Museum of Contemporary Art, the first in Japan to include "contemporary" in its name, opened. It was the year the Tokyo Olympics were held. The museum had a 268 square meter exhibition room on the first floor of the Nagaoka Cultural Center with a separate storage facility. In December, a foundation was established to publicly display paintings collected over many years by Taiko Sogo Bank for the benefit of public society and to contribute to the development of local culture and art. Chairman and Director Jukichi Komagata [1901-1999] founded a mutual loan company with his brother in 1922, which later became Taiko Sogo Bank, where he served as president and chairman of the Nagaoka Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The Taiko Collection, which Komagata collected over decades, was mostly purchased from Takashi Yamamoto of Tokyo Gallery, also from Niigata.[16] Art critic Masayoshi Honma stated regarding this museum opening: "If this is to draw a public line as a museum, it would be necessary to gather insights from various angles and broader perspectives", also pointing out the need for a committee-like organization to operate the business.[17] The museum held the 1st Nagaoka Museum of Contemporary Art Prize exhibition in December of its opening year. This involved selecting the Museum Prize as grand prize from candidate works recommended by selection committee members through judging in public, and purchasing one work per artist from exhibitors other than the winner. It was held five times annually until 1968.

Jukichi Komagata became interested in art due to the influence of his brother, and supported artists through a gathering called "Fura-kai", as well as holding exhibitions. The Taiko Collection, which covers modern and contemporary Japanese painting from Chu Asai to Yoshishige Saito, was formed over approximately ten years. Regarding his collection, art critic Naoyuki Takashima stated: "For Jukichi Komagata, it clearly connected to patron consciousness that corporate entities must bear this in the present era. That determination further connected to new collecting enthusiasm by turning eyes to postwar = contemporary Japanese Western-style painting in order to continue the tradition of contemporary painting interrupted by war".[18] This also resonates with the "reaction to the suffocating state" under military rule pointed out by Takachiyo Uemura.

The judging in public and exhibition of the Nagaoka Museum of Contemporary Art Prize Exhibition were held at the Nagaoka Museum of Contemporary Art through the third session, then the public judging of the fourth session (1967) was held at Asahi Kodo in Tokyo, and for the fifth session (1968), the public judging was held at Seibu Department Store in Ikebukuro, with exhibitions at both Ikebukuro Seibu and the Nagaoka Museum of Contemporary Art. Behind this was an aim to increase recognition of the prize. Leading critics such as Teiichi Hijikata, Ichiro Hariu, and Yusuke Nakahara were involved in selecting invited artists from the first session. In the second exhibition

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(1965), William Lieberman, then a curator in the Department of Prints and Drawings at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, who co-organized the *New Japanese Painting and Sculpture* Exhibition (toured in the US from 1965; held at MoMA in 1966), also participated in selecting foreign artists. Subsequently, selection committee members and judges participated from Italy, Britain, and Germany, showing awareness of international contemporaneity. However, contrary to the high aspirations of those involved trying to handle cutting-edge works, media reaction was insufficient, and it did not spread to the point of penetrating the general audience, so it was suspended after five sessions and never resumed.

In 1970, Jukichi Komagata was effectively ousted from Taiko due to a coup by Hitoshi Komagata, managing director of Taiko Sogo Bank and his son-in-law. Hitoshi Komagata continued purchasing artworks, and the Nagaoka Museum of Contemporary Art continued to exist centered on permanent exhibitions, but in 1979, a reckless lending incident at Taiko was discovered, and it was placed under the control of the Ministry of Finance, forcing the museum to close. The "Taiko Collection," which had been separated among Taiko Sogo Bank, Nagaoka Culture Center (an affiliated company of the bank), and the Nagaoka Museum of Contemporary Art Foundation, was consequently to be sold, consisting of over 700 works at that time. In 1981, Niigata Prefecture purchased 150 works from Taiko for 1 billion yen, becoming the highlight of the collection of the Niigata Prefectural Museum of Modern Art, which opened in Nagaoka City in 1993. The Iwaki City Art Museum in Fukushima Prefecture, which opened in 1984, purchased 54 contemporary American paintings for 200 million yen. The Taiko Collection was housed in 31 public and private museums across the country, including various public museums that were actively being built at the time.[19] In fact, in the inaugural exhibition *Taiko Collection* at the Niigata Prefectural Museum of Modern Art in 1993, the works from the Taiko Collection in various public museum collections gathered together again. The comprehensive high quality is truly outstanding. It can also be said that Jukichi Komagata's vision in fact permeated and continues to live in various parts of the country.

Seiji Tsutsumi (Seibu Museum of Art / Sezon Museum of Art)

In 1975, the Seibu Museum of Art opened in the Ikebukuro Seibu Department Store that had held the Fifth Nagaoka Museum of Contemporary Art Prize Exhibition in 1968. The founder was Seiji Tsutsumi [1927-2013] of the Seibu Distribution Group, also known as the novelist and poet Takashi Tsujii. Born to Yasujiro Tsutsumi, founder of the Seibu Group, Seiji joined Seibu Department Stores in 1954, became managing director and store manager of the Ikebukuro store the following year, and at age 34 became representative director of Seibu Department Stores in 1961. Starting with the *Paul Klee Exhibition* in October 1961, exhibitions were already being held in the 8th floor event hall, but Seiji located the museum on the 12th floor. It was an era that had passed through the Tokyo Olympics and the 1970 Osaka Expo,

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24553

a time transitioning from the "political era" through the 1960 Anpo (Security Treaty) protest, followed by the Vietnam anti-war movement and the Zenkyōtō movement, which began as university disputes, and further the 1970 Anpo protest, toward the "economic era" in Japan. Economically, Japan's GNP became the second largest among capitalist countries in 1968, and in 1973, the first oil shock brought Japan's first negative growth since the war, entering a stable growth period thereafter. Also, whereas the wealth supporting the private museums and collections established in prewar time was largely from secondary industry, the development of tertiary industry, particularly retail and service industries, can be seen in the background of the Seibu Museum of Art.

In the inaugural exhibition catalog *Prospects of Contemporary Japanese Art*, Tsutsumi stated:

> *"What is created in Tokyo in 1975 should not be a museum as a facility for storing works, nor a place to display works converted from wealth accumulated through colonial plunder. First, if it is desirable for it to function as a base for the spirit of the times, what kind of content should the museum have and in what direction should it act as a base?" "Time always flows and changes, people age with the years, and once authority is created, it evokes conservative sentiments in those who operate it. Therefore, the operation of this museum must be maintained by possessors of an incessant destructive spirit". "A museum that is not a museum - we call it a 'street museum,' or claim it is a 'base for the movement of the spirit of the times,' or call it a 'storage of creative aesthetic consciousness,' etc".*[20]

These are words that convey firm vision and suggest the historical background moving from the war, the political era Tsutsumi experienced, toward high economic growth. Tsutsumi developed not only the museum but also theater, music, and publishing as the Cultural Business Department of Seibu Department Stores. The museum handled a wide range of artistic genres, not limited to fine art, including photography, design, fashion, and architecture. It was not uncommon for them to invite critics as guest curators. From solo exhibitions of major artists in 20th-century art history such as Jasper Johns (1978), Marcel Duchamp (1981), Joseph Beuys (1984), and Anselm Kiefer (1993) to large group exhibitions, they changed exhibitions in an extremely short period compared to today, holding 264 exhibitions over 24 years - averaging over 10 per year, until their last exhibition in 1999.[21] In 1989, they relocated the museum to the first and second floors of an annex building and renamed it "Sezon Museum of Art (SMA)." Unexpectedly, the Berlin Wall fell this year, and Japan, which had been boiling with the bubble economy, also began its path to collapse after reaching its peak stock price at the end of that year. It was also the year Japan's Era name

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24553

changed from Showa [1926 - January 7, 1989] to Heisei [January 8, 1989 -2010]. In 1991, Seiji Tsutsumi retired as group representative, and in 1993, Shigeaki Wada, who became president of Seibu Department Stores, changed the direction of cultural strategy. The Sezon Museum of Art closed its curtains in February 1999.[22] Meanwhile, the Takanawa Museum, which opened in Takanawa, Tokyo in 1962, displayed Yasujiro Tsutsumi's Japanese traditional art, but in 1981, during Seiji Tsutsumi's era, it began to focus on contemporary art and relocated to Karuizawa. It has been operating as the Sezon Museum of Modern Art since 1991.

Much analysis has been made from various perspectives regarding Seiji Tsutsumi's art and cultural support and cultural business, including the Seibu Museum of Art and Sezon Museum of Art. Jasper Johns, upon learning of Tsutsumi's death, is said to have told Hideo Namba, director of the Sezon Museum of Art at closing, current honorary director of the Sezon Museum of Modern Art: "I feel that with Seiji Tsutsumi's death, a large part of Japan's contemporary culture has ended".[23] Seiji Tsutsumi truly created a "base for the movement of the spirit of the times" that introduced international contemporary art to Japan and transmitted contemporary Japanese art and culture to the world.

ToshioHara (Hara Museum of Contemporary Art)

In 1979, the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art opened in Gotenyama, Shinagawa-ku, Tokyo. The founder and director, Toshio Hara [1935-], has Rokuro Hara [1842-1933], a major entrepreneur from the end of the Edo period through Meiji and Taisho, as his great-grandfather. Rokuro Hara was a contemporary of Kihachiro Okura [1837-1928], who founded the Okura Museum of Art, and was also an art collector of works by Sesson and Maruyama Okyo. Kunizo Hara [1883-1958], who inherited the family estate from Rokuro, was also a major entrepreneur who managed various companies from Taisho to mid-Showa era. He inherited this Gotenyama land from Rokuro Hara, and in 1938, a modernist building designed by Jin Watanabe incorporating Bauhaus and Art Deco styles was completed. This building would become the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art.

When Toshio Hara inherited this residence, he had no intention of making it into a museum, but after visiting the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark, a residential house converted into a museum, he began to consider converting his inherited house into a museum. Hara recalls that time:

> *In the 1970s, I felt uncomfortable with the fact that Japan was being introduced overseas with a bias towards antiques and traditional performing arts, and decided that a base was needed to promote international exchange through today's art. So, I opened the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, which specialized in contemporary art, a rarity in Japan at the time.*[24]

Museums with permanent collections of contemporary art were ex-

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tremely rare at the time in Japan. Visitors repeatedly came to view permanently installed works by Jean-Pierre Raynaud, Tatsuo Miyajima, Yasumasa Morimura, Yoshitomo Nara, and others. What was even more groundbreaking was taking advantage of the former private residence environment by installing a cafe on the balcony facing the garden. It attracted attention by providing a stylish experience at a contemporary art museum, which was also new to the general public. Also, bilingual guides and publications in Japanese and English were still rare at the time.

The year after opening, the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art established *Hara Annual* to regularly review Japanese contemporary art, and continue it for 10 years. This can be said to be an important initiative in visualizing and historicizing Japanese contemporary art in the 1980s. At the *1st Hara Annual - Prospects for the 1980s*, Arata Isozaki, Yoshiaki Tono, Ichiro Hariu, Tamon Miki, and Katsuhiro Yamaguchi served as selection committee members. In the catalog, Hara wrote:

> *At the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, we aim to facilitate human exchange between artists and collectors, art professionals and general enthusiasts, not just viewing works, but bridging so that they can become friends with each other. The method is to select several artists according to a theme and request their works for exhibition. This is not intended to gather already famous artists, but an attempt to introduce currently active artists and nurture new art together.*[25]

Also, selection committee member Ichiro Hariu stated:

> *The Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, which opened at the end of last year, is attracting attention as Tokyo's only contemporary art museum with a fulfilling permanent collection, though a small private museum. For a museum to actively participate in actual exploration, experimentation, and creation rather than being a hall of authority displaying past masterpieces and classics and illuminate the direction of paths, special exhibitions should above all be the pillar. If this annual exhibition continues as a special exhibition, "the museum can certainly have a more open character through critical function".*[26]

The accumulation from the Hara Annual held ten times can be said to have culminated in the Japanese contemporary art exhibition *A Primal Spiri: Ten Contemporary Japanese Sculptors* that toured the United States in 1990-91. This exhibition was co-organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, with Howard N. Fox of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art as guest curator. It was exhibited at Hara Museum ARC in 1990, then toured the US. Ten sculptors and three-dimensional artists who were attracting attention at the time, including To-

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24553

shikatsu Endo, Tadashi Kawamata, and Shigeo Toya, participated.[27] The Hara Museum of Contemporary Art subsequently toured exhibitions internationally such as *Space, Time, Memory - Photography and Beyond in Japan* (1994-97) and *The World of Shiro Kuramata* (1996-99), making significant contributions to the international dissemination of Japanese contemporary art. The Hara Museum in Shinagawa closed in January 2021, but its contributions to Japanese and international art world and society over 40 years are immeasurable. After closing, it merged with the annex Hara Museum ARC, which opened in 1988, and continues operating as Hara Museum ARC in Shibukawa City, Gunma Prefecture.

III: Regional Development, City Planning and Contemporary Art Museums

Japan's postwar economic development ended with the bubble collapse at the end of 1989, and the era called the "Lost 30 Years" has continued for a long time since. Ironically, the world saw the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, followed by the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The political map of the world changed dramatically, and various cultures nurtured by diverse ethnicities, religions, and histories clearly came to the surface. In that sense, *Magiciens de la Terre* curated by Jean-Hubert Martin in 1989, which juxtaposed works by 100 artists from East and West, including what had traditionally been classified as crafts, ethnology, and anthropology, is historicized as the most symbolic exhibition that pioneered the expansion of the horizon of contemporary art to the world's diverse cultures. Tatsuo Kawaguchi, On Kawara, Tatsuo Miyajima, and Hiroshi Teshigahara participated from Japan.

Domestically, the development of public museums that had continued from the 1970s and 1980s progressed, with the Nagoya City Art Museum opening in 1988, and the Yokohama Museum of Art and Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art (first public museum of contemporary art) opening in 1989. This is the year that the Seibu Museum of Art was renamed the Sezon Museum of Art, and in 1990 the Mito Arts Center and in 1991 the Inokuma Genichiro Museum of Contemporary Art opened. From the late 1980s to the 1990s, without waiting for contemporary art exhibitions at public museums, multiple alternative spaces run by individuals and corporations opened, while most had finished their roles by 2000. Examples include Sagacho Exhibit Space (1983-2000), ICA Nagoya (1986-1992), Toko Museum of Contemporary Art (1988-1991), and Roentgen Kunst Institut (1991-1995). From the perspective of exhibition history, extremely important exhibitions were held at these spaces. As one era gave way to the next era, international art festivals such as biennales and triennales started to attract attention. In Asia, for instance, starting with the biennale established in Gwangju, South Korea in 1995, they were founded in various cities including Shanghai (1996) and Taipei (1998). In Japan, the Japan International Art Exhibition (Tokyo Biennale), which began in 1952, closed in 1990, and a new era of regional art festivals arrived.

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The Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial was established in 2000, and the Yokohama Triennale in 2001. Opportunities to encounter contemporary art were no longer limited to museums, and international art festivals began to play an important role.

In an era when both national and local governments came to have their own art museums, what remained to be sought? As case studies, this chapter presents a project and a museum that established themselves as platforms connecting international contemporary art while maintaining a rigorous commitment to the cultural advancement of specific localities. One represents a critical project against Tokyo's centralization. Standing in contrast is a project that aimed to embed contemporary art within urban life at the very center of Tokyo.

Soichiro Fukutake (Benesse House Museum and other Art Projects)

Soichiro Fukutake [1945-] returned to his hometown of Okayama from Tokyo following the sudden death of his father, Tetsuhiko Fukutake [1915-1986]. Former school teacher Tetsuhiko Fukutake established a publishing company, and later founded Fukutake Publishing Co., Ltd. In the 1960s, Tetsuhiko began correspondence education and succeeded. He was also an art collector, collecting hundreds of works by Okayama-born Yasuo Kuniyoshi [1889-1953], who was highly regarded in America in the first half of the 20th century, as well as masterpieces of Western painting. Soichiro Fukutake purchased all of Kuniyoshi's works that had been displayed in the Fukutake Publishing Co., Ltd. head office building and currently on long-term loan to Okayama Prefecture as the Fukutake Collection. Soichiro Fukutake's name is named after Soichiro Ohara of Ohara Museum of Art in the same prefecture, Okayama, and indeed the same spirit seems to be inherited.

Soichiro Fukutake says that the Naoshima campsite conceived by his father Tetsuhiko in 1985 was the beginning of everything. Soichiro Fukutake also toured the islands of the Seto Inland Sea again and, despite the beautiful scenery of the region, realized that the negative effects of urbanization and modernization were borne by rural areas, such as environmental damage from smelters on Naoshima and Inujima and illegal dumping of industrial waste on Teshima. He aimed for a "transition from a civilization that repeats destruction and creation" to a "civilization that continues to grow by making use of what exists and creating what doesn't exist." He also said: "People in cities who pursue only their own happiness and compete in doing so constantly feel frustrated and anxious".[28] This major shift in values relating to way of life began with the Benesse House Museum on Naoshima in 1992, leading to multiple museums up to the Naoshima New Museum in 2025 (commissioning Tadao Ando for museums' architectural design, making it the 10th museum), numerous Art House Projects by contemporary artists renovating old private houses, the Inujima Seirensho Art Museum, and Life of Plants Garden, the Teshima Art Museum, works by Christian Boltanski and Mariko Mori on Teshima, and more - Fukutake's vision truly continues to grow. Furthermore, the Setouchi Triennale was established

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in 2010, and the entire Seto Inland Sea area has definitely established itself as a place known globally for contemporary art. The contemporary art project centered on Naoshima and other Island can be said to be unparalleled in the world in terms of its scale and the quality of inviting world-class artists. And certainly, Naoshima, Inujima, Teshima, and other islands in the Seto Inland Sea have been transformed into a major art area attracting attention from around the world.

What is noteworthy about the operational structure is that for the series of art projects centered on Naoshima, Fukutake established Naoshima Bunkamura Inc. in 1991 as a wholly owned subsidiary of Benesse Holdings Inc. This company is responsible for the operation and management of accommodation facilities and art facilities, as well as facility management. Meanwhile, in 2004, Fukutake established the Fukutake Foundation as a public interest incorporated foundation, and in 2012, integrated two additional foundations responsible for grant programs. The foundation operates museums on Naoshima, Teshima, and Inujima, provides grants for regional revitalization activities, and conducts independent and co-sponsored projects supporting events such as the Setouchi Triennale. The fact that this model, which integrates for-profit business with public benefit activities, contributes to the sustainability of cultural activities in the region is particularly compelling.

Minaru Mori and Yoshiko Mori (Mori Art Museum)

The Mori Art Museum opened in October 2003 as a cultural facility symbolizing the large-scale urban development Roppongi Hills that opened in Tokyo in April 2003. Founder Minoru Mori [1934-2012] designated the concept of the Roppongi Hills by Mori Building Co., Ltd. as “Cultural City Center,” placing the Mori Art Museum as an international contemporary art museum at its center. His father, Taikichiro Mori [1904-1993], ran the family rice store and real estate rental business in Minato-ku, Tokyo, while also teaching economics as a scholar. Taikichiro established Mori Real Estate in 1955 and Mori Building Co., Ltd. in 1959. He likely had strong feelings about the reconstruction of Tokyo, which suffered from the Great Kanto Earthquake and was reduced to scorched earth by the Second World War. Second son Minoru Mori majored in French literature at the University of Tokyo and aspired to be a novelist, but during his student days he contracted pleurisy and began helping the family business during home recuperation. This became the opportunity to learn about Le Corbusier and thoroughly read his *The Radiant City*. In 1959, Minoru Mori also joined Mori Building. In 1993, Minoru succeeded his father Taikichiro as CEO.

Mori Building invited Suntory Hall, a full-fledged classical concert hall, in the large-scale complex development Ark Hills in 1986. Subsequently, the Mori Art Museum was conceived for the development of Roppongi Hills. In the opening press release, Minoru Mori stated:

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> *When I began conceiving "Roppongi Hills" 17 years ago, I thought of creating a 'Cultural City Center' here in Roppongi and making a new museum centered on contemporary art worthy of being a symbol of the city. This is because contemporary art is a mirror that most honestly reflects the social and cultural situation of the times, people's lives, and the spirit of the times, and also holds unknown territory and infinite possibilities, open to the future. I have always thought that such a museum is most suitable for a city where people overflowing with creativity who create a new era gather.*[29]

He clearly stated the necessity of it being a "contemporary art museum." The background to choosing culture to make Tokyo one of the world's leading cities was his idea after traveling to major cities around the world that "The Business community is the patron of the arts, and arts and culture are the measurement of the city's attractiveness or magnetic force".[30]

He placed a contemporary art museum with an exhibition area of 3,000 square meters on the top two floors of the 53 stories high building, which could expect high revenue if one thinks as a real estate rental business. Subsequently, it was reorganized to the 53rd floor of 2,000 square meters as the Mori Art Museum focusing on originally curated exhibitions, the 52nd floor as Mori Arts Center Gallery for venue rental business, and Tokyo City View as observation deck business. From a purely profitability perspective, it is difficult for the Mori Art Museum alone to be in the black, but regarding the reason for placing a contemporary art museum on the top floor, Minoru Mori gave three reasons:

> *The one was to make visible my concept of creating a 'cultural heart' for Tokyo. The museum was to be the symbol of the entire city. If we hid away, no one would take it seriously. [...] The Mori Art Museum is not yet a profit center, as one can imagine. But it has brought to us immeasurable value.*
>
> *Secondly, I wanted people who did not have a particular interest in contemporary art to visit the museum.*
>
> *The third reason [...] is that I wanted people who saw contemporary art to also take a hard look at Tokyo as it stands now. [...] This combination of city views and art museum was indeed a business strategy, but it also derived from my very deep interest as an individual who has dedicated his life to city-making.*[31]

Furthermore, Mori also stated:

> *Roppongi Hills and contemporary art share many common traits. Both want to capture today's trends and to create something out of it. We express ourselves in the present con-*

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tinuous tense, and we aim at the unknowns, the untested waters.[32]

The Mori Art Museum, which marks its 24th year of operation this year, was founded on the vision of its founder Minoru Mori, brought to fruition and established by Yoshiko Mori [1940-2025], the first Chairperson of the Board, and passed on to the current Chairperson, Kyoko Mori, in January 2025. During this time, it has grown into a globally recognized contemporary art museum in Tokyo. To this day, it operates and governed as a division of Mori Building Co., Ltd. without becoming an independent non-profit foundation. As Mori Building overall, it is even expanding cultural facilities further at new developments such as Toranomon Hills, Azabudai Hills, etc., coexisting venue renting model with self-organizing projects. As a symbol of contemporary art in the city of Tokyo, it continues to discuss sustainable operating models for the Mori Art Museum.

Funding Sources and Operating Bodies

Up to this point, we have examined the genealogy of private museums funded primarily by private capital, focusing on several case studies. I have included examples of collections that were assembled but subsequently dispersed, as well as cases of museums that did not continue operations. As mentioned in the text, when examining the funding sources for each from the perspective of industry type, we can see that from the Meiji period through the early Showa period, privately-led industries involved in building the modern nation-state formed the background—including the textile industry, railway industry, steel industry, and shipbuilding industry. For the postwar period, we have covered examples from various industries including manufacturing, finance, retail, and real estate. Private museums backed by these industries include cases operated by an owner's private funds, instances operated as a division of a corporation such as the Sezon Museum of Art, and the Mori Art Museum which continues to operate as a corporate division today. There are also cases that were incorporated as foundations early on after the museum's opening, such as the Ohara Museum of Art and the Artizon Museum (formerly the Bridgestone Museum of Art), as well as the example of the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, which established the Foundation Arc-en-Ciel in 1977, two years before the museum's opening. Alternatively, there is the example of Benesse, where a for-profit private corporation and non-profit foundation operate in parallel. The Kawamura Memorial DIC Museum of Art, which closed in 2025, was a corporate direct-operation model, and concerns were raised about the instability of cultural enterprises dependent on corporate performance and shareholder activists. However, as the museum is still undergoing transformation and no clear future direction has been presented, I have not included it as a case study here. Nevertheless, even when the operating body has been incorporated as a foundation, considering the ongoing funding necessary for museum operations, a substantial endowment capable of generating operating income or holdings of parent com-

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pany stock become necessary. Profitability from museum operations alone can hardly be expected. There are also constraints on activities under foundation management, and in cases like the Mori Art Museum, because the parent body is a privately held company, the decision has been made that direct operation offers greater advantages than foundation incorporation in various respects. Museum operations are not simple enough to be easily analyzed from an institutional perspective alone. This is complexly intertwined with issues of our nation's tax system, particularly charitable donation tax system, and foundation system, and further discussion of this must be reserved for another occasion.

Sustainability or Contribution to the Era

At the outset, I noted that operational sustainability represents a major challenge for private museums. While establishing a foundation does not automatically ensure the continuation of vibrant activities, whether structured as a foundation, directly operated by a corporation, or privately funded, such institutions remain inseparable from the economic trends of their time and their operational performance. Moreover, sustaining the founder's mission across generations is no easy task. In the United States, there are models such as the Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim Museum in New York—institutions founded on individual initiative that continue to be supported as nonprofit organizations by multiple trustees and board members. However, the tax incentive systems for donations differ significantly from those in Japan. Within this context, examples such as the Ohara Museum of Art and the Bridgestone Museum / Artizon Museum, which have continued to innovate across generations, merit recognition.

That said, sustainability alone does not constitute the sole measure of value. Outstanding artworks from the Matsukata Collection and the Taiko Collection are housed in museums throughout the country. The Seibu Museum of Art / the Sezon Museum of Art, and the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art in Shinagawa made immense contributions during the formative period of international art in Japan, and many artists and museum professionals hold these as important experiences and memories. The Nagaoka Museum of Contemporary Art's open jury system with prominent international jurors was groundbreaking for a regional museum. Considering these examples, it becomes possible to argue that what matters is not mere continuation, but rather the impact a museum exerts in its own era, and its historical significance—whether it brings about meaningful change for future generations, even in different forms.

Individual Vision and Action

Seiji Tsutsumi once described supporting culture as "the moral duty of those living in the same era." Jukichi Komagata remarked: "In the past, it was feudal lords, major landowners, and the wealthy who loved and protected art. In the modern nation-state, this is no longer possible. As a result, important artworks are being dispersed and lost. In today's Japan, perhaps only corporations can protect art." Indeed, in the cas-

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es examined in this paper, the driving forces behind each individual's vision and action included the protection and preservation of national cultural properties during our country's rapid modernization, support for Japanese artists and society's exposure to Western art, promotion of internationalization through art, and support for the museum system that underpins these efforts. Furthermore, once our country had completed its modernization and economic growth, and the wave of museum openings across the nation had settled, new driving forces emerged: the rehabilitation of regional areas that had borne the negative consequences of modernization and urbanization, and questions about the quality of urban life. These strong wills transcended "private interests" and arose from thinking about the "public good"—perhaps even more so than public organizations themselves. Equally crucial was the availability of financial resources to translate these visions into action and make them realizable. This paper aims to reaffirm that there exists a history in which private funds have shouldered social roles that the public sector has failed to fulfill in order to secure the position of our country's contemporary art within the global art world, and that this history has been driven by individuals with strong vision and action.

Today, industrial structures have dramatically changed, with wealth concentrated in industries different from those of the 20th century. The global art world and museum sector are interconnected in increasingly complex and intricate ways, with rapid information sharing. Political and economic conditions in each country are changing at a dizzying pace. Within this context, entirely new types of collectors have emerged in our country, backed by IT and financial industries, and we are beginning to see individuals who seek to support Japan's museum sector in unprecedented forms. Meanwhile, national and public museums, which rely heavily on operating grants and local government subsidies, are being called upon more than ever to secure private funding. This issue has already been recognized by European museums, some of which have transformed themselves toward American-style private fundraising models. The limitations of our country's tax incentive system for donations and the need to cultivate a culture of philanthropy have also been pointed out. In any case, museums are extremely unprofitable as business models. Nevertheless, collecting, exhibiting, and preserving contemporary art whose value has yet to be established is precisely what Tsutsumi called "the moral duty of those living in the same era." This is a vital mission that connects our era to the future. While the cases in this paper arose from different historical backgrounds and socioeconomic conditions, I hope that the new wealth generated by 21st-century industries will also give birth to vision and action that connects our era to the future, and that through collaboration with public institutions and public museum activities, contemporary culture will be passed on to the next generation.

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Endnotes:

Editorial Note: this contribution is published within the dossier as a documentary appendix and consists of a survey of private art museums in Japan. Given its nature, it has not been subject to peer review.

1 National Council of Art Museums 2026.

2 Miyano 2002, p. 138.

3 Matsukata 1959, p. 4.

4 Ishida 1995, p. 17.

5 Yashiro 2019, p. 35.

6 Ishida 1995, pp. 94-96.

7 Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum 2026.

8 Kaneda 2012, p. 167.

9 Inoue 1998, p. 87.

10 Umemura 1955, p. 96.

11 Inoue 1998, pp. 188-189.

12 Ohara 1954 cited in Inoue 1998, p. 190.

13 Inoue 1998, p. 200.

14 Miyazaki 2002, p. 115.

15 Miyazaki 2002, p. 116.

16 Honma 1964, p. 119.

17 Honma 1964, p. 119.

18 Takashima 2002, p.10.

19 Kobayashi 2003, p. 38.

20 Tsutsumi 1975, n.p.

21 Sezon Museum of Art 1999, p. 329.

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23 Namba 2014, p. 97.

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26 Hariu 1980, n.p.

27 Mitsuyama 2009.

28 Fukutake 2010.

29 Mori 2012.

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31 Mori 2012, pp. 22-23.

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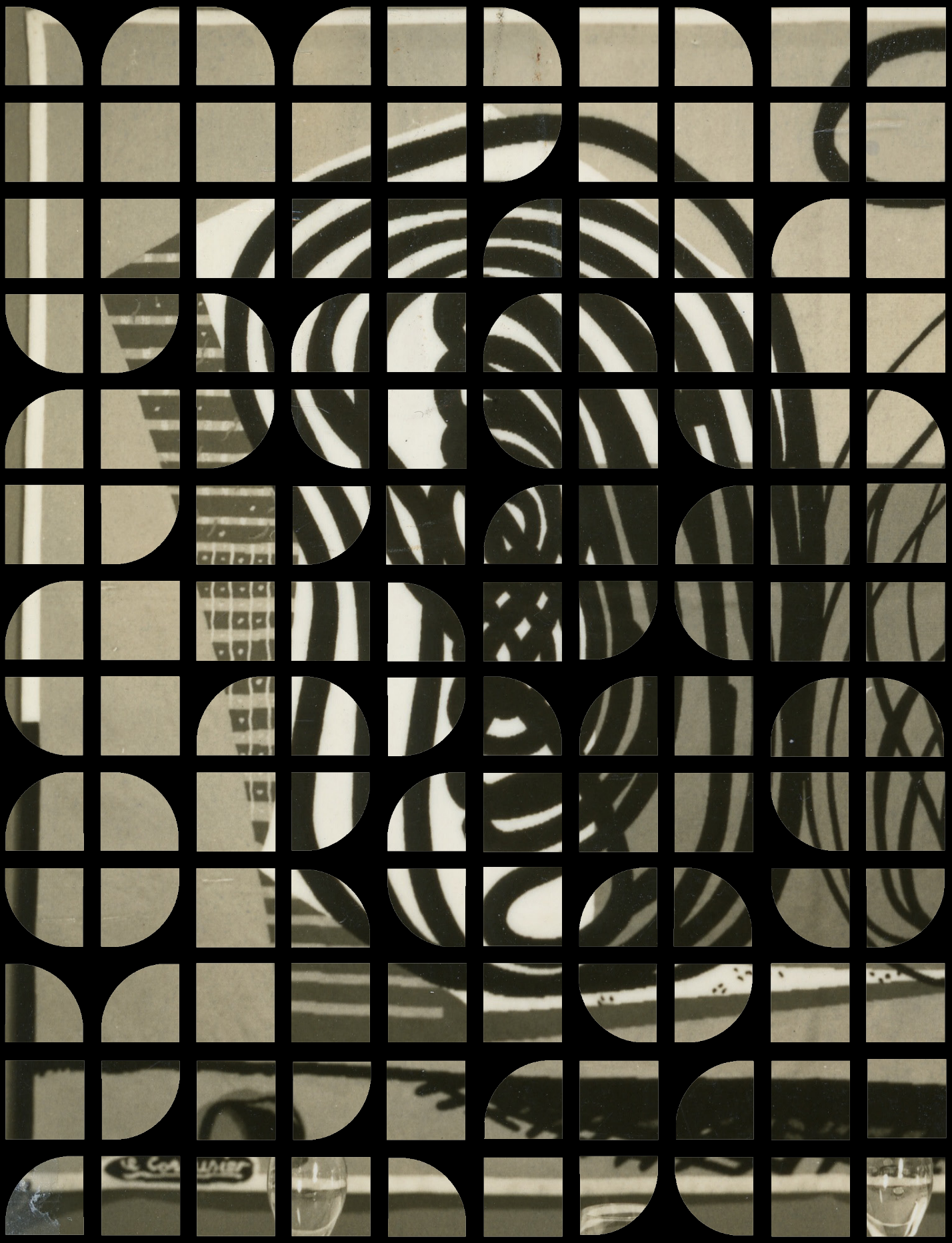
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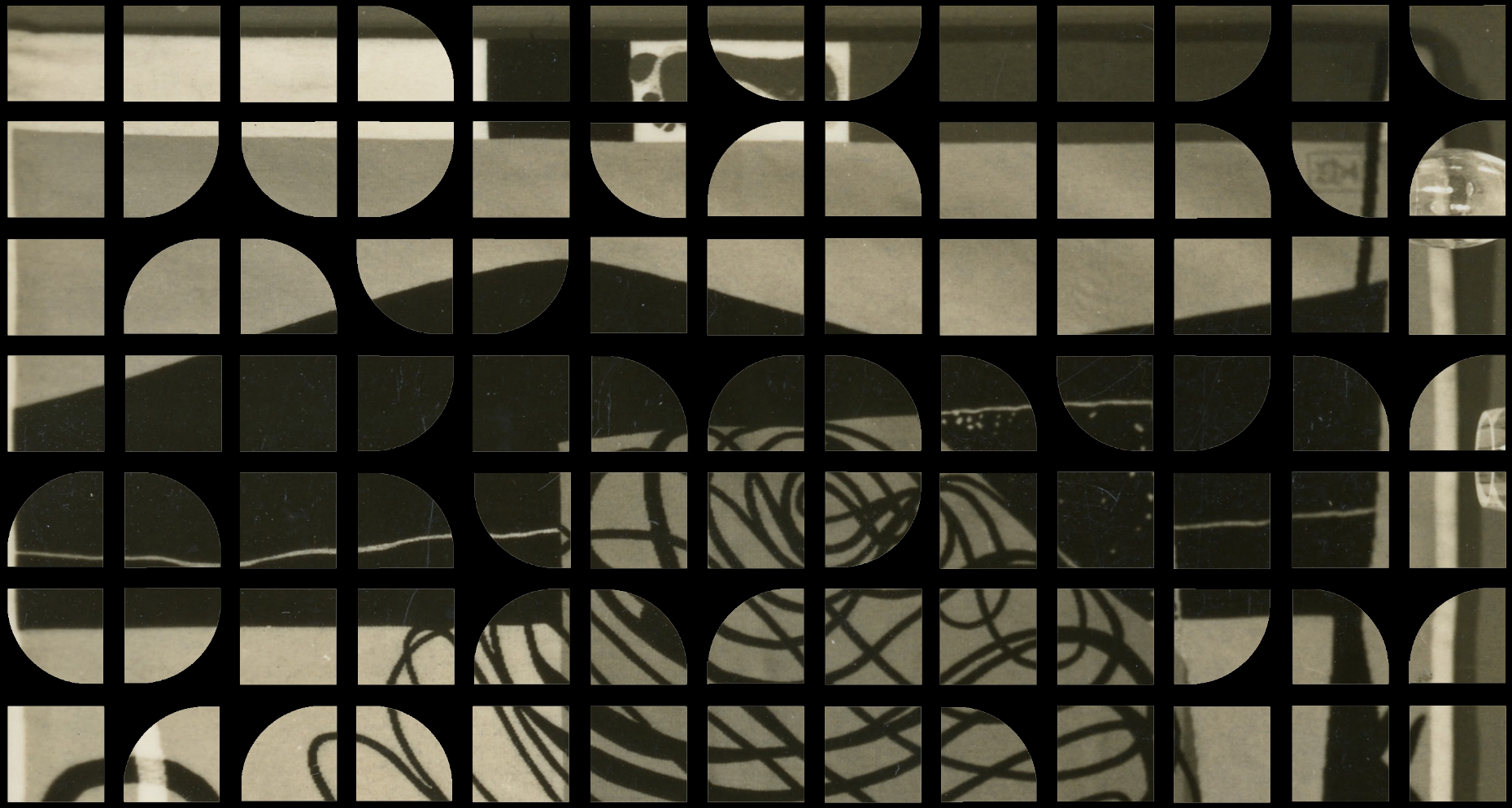
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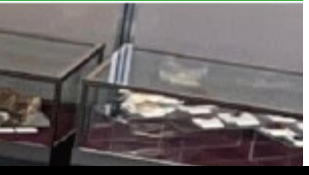
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From Passive Viewers to Active Curators: Rethinking Museum Education through Youth Engagement

Ayako Umemura

Keywords:
Youth as active curators; Museum education; Youth engagement; Heritage education; Well-being



ABSTRACT:

In Japan, the *Museum Act* stipulates that museums have both educational and research roles; however, curators are primarily assigned research duties, resulting in an imbalance that has constrained the development of museum education (Kurita 2019). As a consequence, museum education in Japan has often emphasized explanation and knowledge transmission, positioning children and youth primarily as passive recipients rather than active participants. Amid shifts in educational philosophy and societal expectations—and reflecting broader global trends in experiential and inquiry-based learning—new models have emerged that encourage children and youth to participate more actively in museum activities, paralleling the aims of child-curator programs seen in various regions. This study examines two initiatives at Nagoya University Museum: MusaForum, a university student–led initiative, and the Kiso Horse Project, a museum–school collaborative program. Through an analysis of program design, participant roles, and learning processes, these cases demonstrate how program designs grounded in preparatory engagement, hands-on practice, and structured reflection enable young participants to act as active contributors rather than passive recipients. By positioning museums as dynamic platforms for youth-driven inquiry, this study proposes a multi-layered program-design model that integrates scientific inquiry, cultural understanding, and well-being, offering practical implications for participatory museum education and the evolving role of museums as collaborative learning ecosystems.

In Giappone, il *Museum Act* stabilisce che i musei abbiano sia un ruolo educativo sia un ruolo di ricerca; tuttavia, ai curatori vengono assegnati principalmente compiti di ricerca, determinando uno squilibrio che ha limitato lo sviluppo dell'educazione museale (Kurita 2019). Di conseguenza, l'educazione museale in Giappone ha spesso enfatizzato la spiegazione e la trasmissione di conoscenze, collocando bambini e giovani prevalentemente come destinatari passivi piuttosto che come partecipanti attivi. Nel contesto dei cambiamenti nella filosofia educativa e nelle aspettative sociali – e in linea con le più ampie tendenze globali verso un apprendimento esperienziale e basato sull'indagine – sono emersi nuovi modelli che incoraggiano bambini e giovani a partecipare più attivamente alle attività museali. Questo studio esamina due iniziative del Nagoya University Museum: MusaForum, un'iniziativa guidata da studenti universitari, e il Kiso Horse Project, un programma collaborativo tra museo e scuola. Attraverso un'analisi della progettazione dei programmi, dei ruoli dei partecipanti e dei processi di apprendimento, questi casi dimostrano come modelli progettuali fondati su una preparazione iniziale, attività pratiche e riflessione strutturata consentano ai giovani partecipanti di agire come contributori attivi piuttosto che come destinatari passivi. Questo studio propone un modello multilivello di progettazione dei programmi che integra ricerca scientifica, comprensione culturale e benessere, offrendo implicazioni pratiche per un'educazione museale partecipativa e per l'evoluzione del ruolo dei musei come ecosistemi collaborativi di apprendimento.

Opening Picture:

Fig. 1b: Examples of activities within MusaForum as a learning and facilitation platform.

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I. Introduction

The development of museum education in Japan has been closely tied to shifts in educational philosophy and societal expectations since the postwar period. A key turning point was the *Museum Act* of 1951, which defined museums as institutions that collect, preserve, and exhibit materials, conduct research, and utilize these activities for educational purposes.[1] This legal foundation positioned museums as educational institutions aligned with the national education system.

However, as Kurita observes, curators' research duties have historically centered on collections, limiting the development of educational practices that promote active forms of learning.[2] Similarly, Kurata notes that the term *kyoiku fukyu* (educational propagation)[3] reflects the long-standing perception of education as a secondary and one-directional function, rather than as a participatory or creative process. Despite ongoing discussion of learner-centered approaches, this notion remains embedded in museum practice, partly due to limited institutional support for educational innovation. National surveys[4] confirm that educational activities are often integrated within curatorial work, underscoring the structural challenges of promoting participatory learning. Building on the concept of citizen participation articulated in third-generation museums, more recent initiatives led by students or community members exemplify characteristics of fourth-generation museums, where learners and citizens actively shape educational and exhibition practices.[5]

By comparison, broader developments in educational theory had long highlighted experience and inquiry as essential to meaningful learning. Building on these foundational ideas, Dewey,[6] Piaget,[7] and Kolb[8] articulated the roles of active engagement, reflection, and learner agency in fostering deep understanding. Problem-based learning[9] and project-based learning[10] as well as object-based learning[11] subsequently provided pedagogical frameworks closely aligned with museum education. Through workshops, participatory programs, and hands-on experiences, museums have increasingly offered opportunities for inquiry, reflection, and collaboration, promoting both personal and social development.[12] In recent years, international frameworks have further encouraged this shift toward participatory practice. The UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education (2024), the OECD Learning Compass 2030/2040, and the ICOM (2022) museum definition all highlight museums as inclusive, learner-centered spaces that foster creativity, well-being, and sustainable development.[13]

In line with these global and theoretical developments, this study examines two ongoing initiatives in Japan that exemplify participatory and inclusive approaches to museum education. The first initiative, MusaForum, functions as a university student–led platform through which participating students cultivate skills in exhibition development, facilitation, and reflective dialogue. This platform also serves as the operational and educational infrastructure for the second initiative, the Kiso Horse Project, where these trained university students mentor high school participants

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as they research and present local cultural heritage. Both initiatives extend the philosophy of child-curator programs, which position young people as active interpreters and creators within museum contexts,[14] by demonstrating how participatory principles can be scaled across age groups and embedded within sustained museum–school–community collaboration.

Taken together, the two initiatives form a layered model of youth participation in which museums support the progressive development of learner agency. As discussed in this study, this progression ranges from university students serving as emerging facilitators to high school students as inquiry-driven participants.

II. Program Design and Implementation

This section outlines the design and implementation of two interconnected initiatives—MusaForum and the Kiso Horse Project—that together constitute a multi-layered model of youth participation in museum practice. Rather than functioning as isolated case studies, the two programs form a developmental continuum: MusaForum cultivates university students' competencies in communication, facilitation, and project planning, while the Kiso Horse Project engages these trained students as mentors who support high school learners in inquiry-driven, exhibition-oriented activities.

II-1. MusaForum: A Learning Infrastructure for Emerging Youth Curators

Established in 2020, MusaForum is a student-led organization affiliated with the Nagoya University Museum.[15] With more than 200 active members as of 2025, the organization functions as a sustained learning community through which university students develop competencies essential for museum practice, including scientific communication, dialogue facilitation, collaborative planning, and reflective engagement.

Unlike one-off museum programs, MusaForum provides an institutional infrastructure that allows students to engage continuously in exhibition preparation, public programming, and peer-learning activities (Figure 1a). These engagements enable students to transition from passive participants to emerging youth curators capable of designing learning experiences for diverse audiences.



1a

Fig. 1a: Examples of activities within MusaForum as a learning and facilitation platform. Students engaged in collaborative planning and preparation for museum exhibition and dialogue-based activities.

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Previous research has analyzed visitor responses to MusaForum-led outreach events.[16] While such findings demonstrate the effectiveness of student facilitation (Figure 1b), the current study positions MusaForum not as an audience-engagement case, but as a pedagogical platform that systematically cultivates university students' agency and curatorial literacy. Through repeated cycles of planning, practice, and reflection, students learn to articulate their interests, assume responsibility for educational design, and navigate collaborative decision-making.



1b

Importantly, MusaForum serves as the human and pedagogical foundation for the Kiso Horse Project. The competencies developed through MusaForum's ongoing activities—particularly the ability to design inquiry-oriented learning environments and facilitate participant engagement—directly support university students' roles as mentors and co-learners in the subsequent project. In this sense, MusaForum represents the "developmental first layer" of a broader model of youth participation in museum practice.

II-2. Kiso Horse Project: Inquiry, Fieldwork, and Exhibition-Making with High School Learners

Launched in 2024 as a collaboration between the Nagoya University Museum and the Nagoya University Affiliated Upper and Lower Secondary Schools, the Kiso Horse Project has engaged high school students in a series of inquiry-driven activities. The Kiso Horse—one of Japan's eight native horse breeds—has been preserved through the lineage of the stallion *Dai-san Haruyama*, whose complete skeleton (Figure 2) housed at the Nagoya University Museum. Centered on it, the project aims to foster scientific curiosity, cultural awareness, and agency through hands-on fieldwork, museum-based research, and public exhibition development.[17]

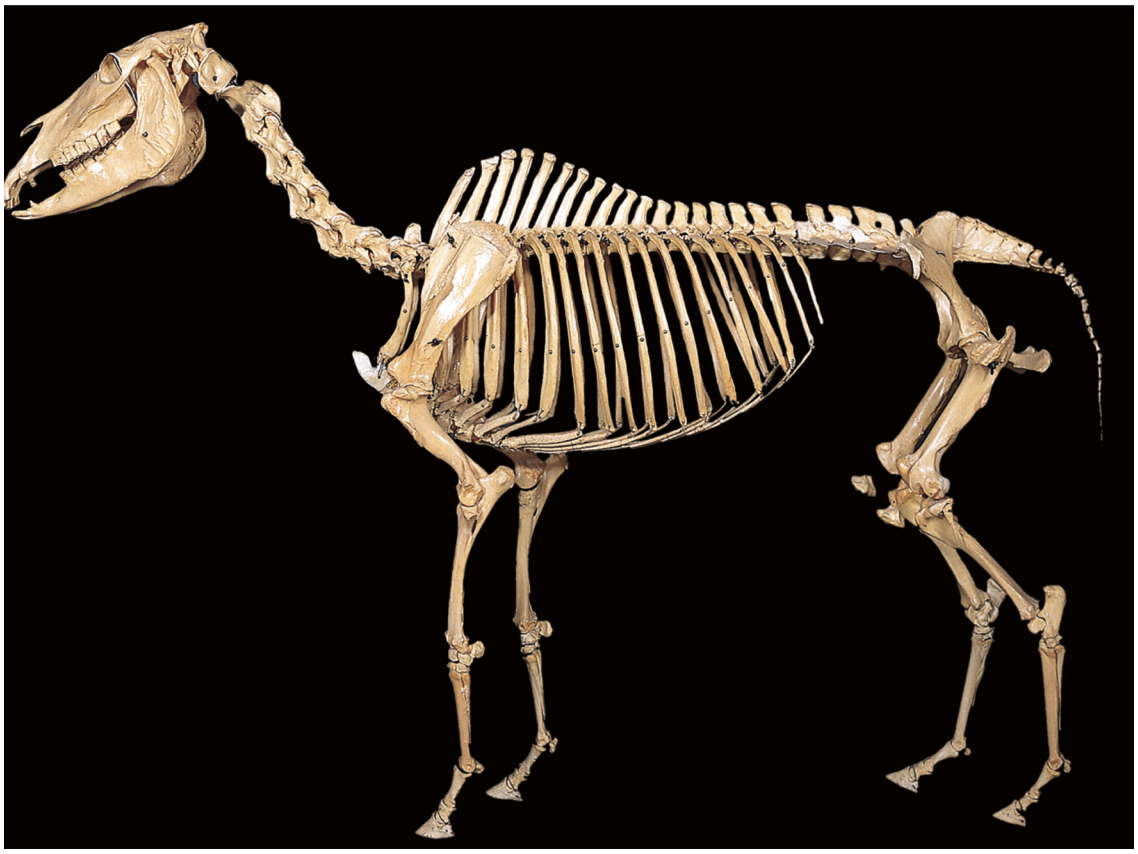
The program follows a PDCA (Plan–Do–Check–Act)-inspired structure consisting of three overlapping phases (Figure 3):

(1) Planning and Preparation

High school students begin by observing the skeleton specimen, conducting literature research, and participating in workshops on science communication facilitated by museum staff and MusaForum students. Drawing on Keller's ARCS model,[18] the program incorporates motivational elements that promote curiosity and personal relevance. Students identify inquiry questions, plan field activities, and design approaches for collecting and interpreting data. This phase emphasizes inquiry-orientation, critical thinking, and project planning.

Fig. 1b: Examples of activities within MusaForum as a learning and facilitation platform. Student facilitators and children engaging in dialogic, hands-on observation of a sperm whale skeletal specimen at Nagoya University Museum, collaboratively exploring and interpreting the specimen through tactile and inquiry-oriented interaction.

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2

(2) Execution and Application

Students deepen their investigation through direct interactions with live Kiso Horses, including care activities, observation, and ecological fieldwork conducted at Kaida Plateau. Weekly "Kiso Horse Seminars," supported by museum staff and MusaForum students, provide structured opportunities for synthesizing findings, refining research themes, and discussing emerging questions. These processes allow high school students to connect scientific and cultural knowledge while developing practical and inquiry-oriented skills.

Fig. 2: Skeletal specimen of the last purebred Kiso Horse, Daisan Haruyama, housed at Nagoya University Museum.

(3) Exhibit Development and Reflection

Students collaboratively design public-facing exhibit materials—such as the "Kiso Horse Boxes"—that integrate scientific information with tactile, inclusive features. The process requires students to translate research into accessible formats, engaging in curator-like tasks such as audience analysis, interpretive design, and iterative refinement. Many students extend their participation by presenting posters at school meetings, submitting photographs to competitions, or applying their experiences to educational and career decision-making.

Above all these phases, high school students transition from learners to novice youth curators, supported by trained university students who serve as facilitators and co-researchers.

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3

III. Youth as Active Curators: A Multi-Layered Model of Participation

Building on the program descriptions in Chapter II, this chapter analyzes how students at different developmental stages engage in curator-like practices and how these practices contribute to their learning. The focus is on the educational processes and outcomes that characterize the multi-layered "youth curator" model.

III-1. University Students as Emerging Curators (MusaForum)

Within MusaForum, university students take on responsibilities such as planning educational programs, selecting and interpreting specimens, and facilitating dialogue with visitors. These activities require students to synthesize disciplinary knowledge, articulate their interests, and make interpretive decisions, thereby moving from passive recipients of museum content to ac-

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tive youth curators.

This process aligns with Ogawa's[19] view that museum learning emerges when learners integrate their personal experiences with museum resources. Through iterative cycles of preparation, public engagement, and reflection, students gradually transform tacit forms of understanding into shareable interpretations, echoing Nonaka's[20] concept of knowledge externalization. In this sense, MusaForum functions as a capacity-building environment that develops competencies in communication, collaboration, and interpretive design.

These competencies create the foundation for students' subsequent roles as mentors[21] in the Kiso Horse Project. Their experience in facilitating inquiry-oriented learning environments enables them to guide high school participants while continuing to develop their own curatorial literacy.

Fig. 3: Learning process of high school students in the Kiso Horse Project. (a) Question-and-answer session with a Kiso Horse caretaker, in which inquiry topics were generated through dialogue with project members. (b) Experimental investigations using live horses, such as heart rate measurement, conducted during fieldwork at Kiso-uma-no-sato, Kaida Plateau. (c) Student-produced exhibit artifacts "Kiso Horse Boxes," translating research findings into public-facing, tactile works through curator-like practices.

III-2. High School Students as Novice Curators (Kiso Horse Project)

In the Kiso Horse Project, high school students engage in research, fieldwork, and exhibition-making that parallel professional museum practices. With guidance from museum staff and MusaForum students, they formulate questions, collect and interpret data, and produce exhibit materials that communicate their findings to public audiences.

Weekly "Kiso Horse Seminars" enabled students to engage in curator-like processes, including research, expert consultation, and collaboration. They refined observations, explored emerging questions, and deepened understanding, responding to evolving interests such as targeted lectures by a horse husbandry specialist. Through this combination of structured guidance and autonomous inquiry, students developed skills in scientific investigation, critical thinking, and collaborative problem-solving, while sustaining engagement with both the cultural and scientific dimensions of the Kiso Horse.

These activities culminated in the creation of the "Kiso Horse Boxes," tactile exhibit materials designed to convey students' findings to museum audiences. The boxes incorporated diverse topics such as heart rate, hoof and dental structure and function, integrating direct observation with scientific inquiry. Figure 4 presents a representative example focusing on hoof structure and functional anatomy. Accessibility considerations allowed visually impaired visitors to engage with the materials, thus creating a multi-sensory and inclusive exhibit. By preparing these materials, students consolidated learning and assumed responsibilities similar to professional curators, translating research into public-facing outcomes. The process also enhanced students' awareness of social and cultural issues and fostered interest in regional culture.

IV. Discussion: Implications for Museum Education

The findings from Chapter III demonstrate that MusaForum and the Kiso Horse Project function not as independent programs but as interconnected components of a multi-layered youth–curator model. Each initiative engages learners in authentic museum practices—speci-

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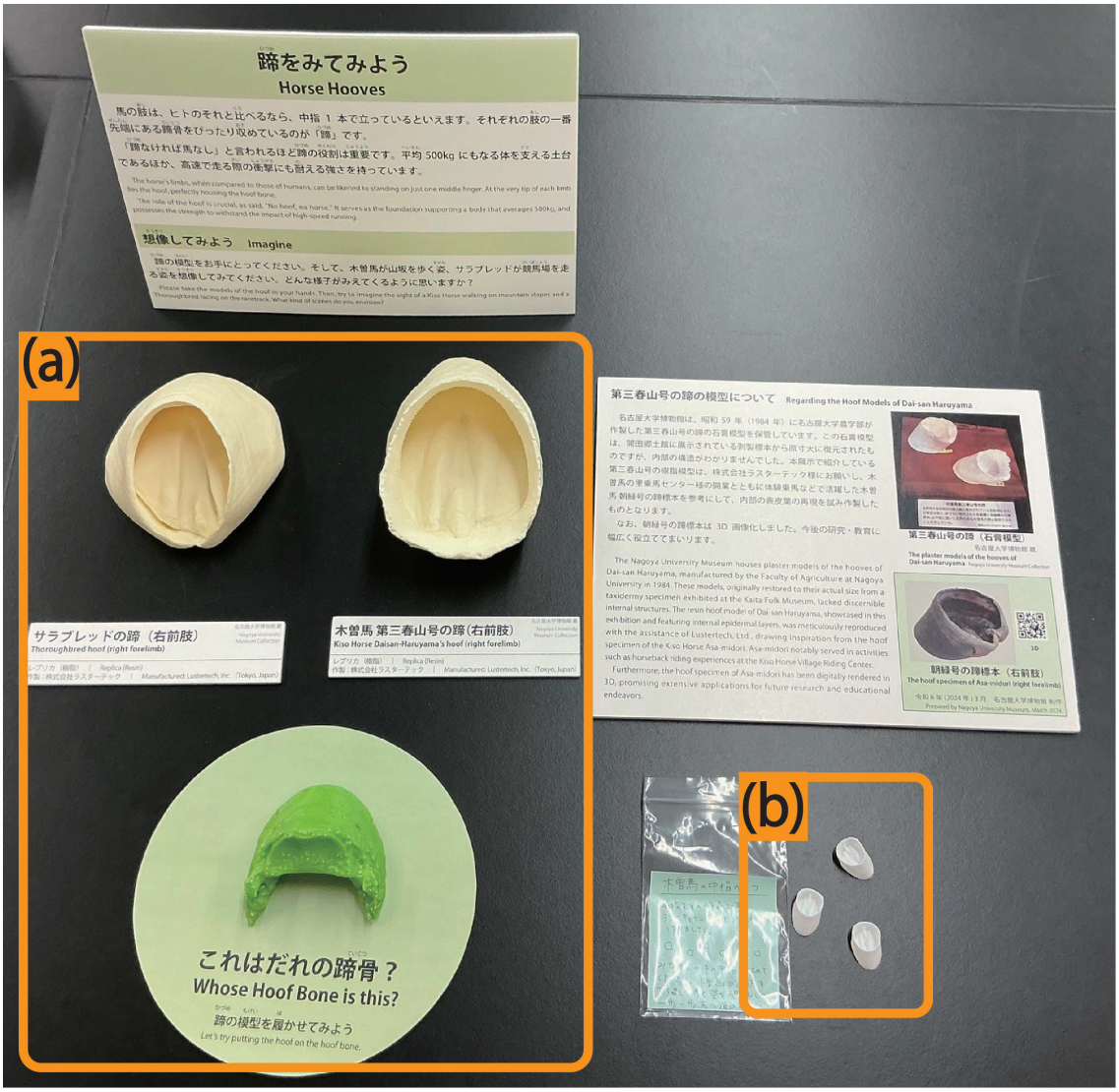


Fig. 4:
Tactile tools for exploring horse structure. (a) Resin models of the hooves of a Kiso Horse and a Thoroughbred, including the third phalanx of the Kiso Horse. (b) A tool from the "Kiso Horse Box," designed by a high school student to convey a horse's standing posture. Reflecting the anatomical fact that horses stand on a single digit, the tool was designed to fit on the middle finger and produced using 3D scanning and 3D printing.

men-based interpretation, research, facilitation, and exhibition-making—while allocating responsibilities appropriate to their developmental stage. University students deepen curatorial literacy through iterative cycles of planning and public engagement, whereas high school students apply inquiry-based methods to investigate cultural heritage. Together, these processes reveal how participatory museum education can cultivate progressively greater learner agency, extending the philosophy of child-curator initiatives into adolescence and young adulthood.

Building on this perspective, this chapter discusses the broader implications of these initiatives for the future of museum education. The analysis highlights three interrelated domains: (1) the expansion of museums' educational mandate through youth agency and human-resource development, (2) the role of museums as holistic learning environments that integrate well-being support, and (3) the contribution of youth participation to community and cultural sustainability.

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IV-1. Expanding Museums' Educational Mandate through Youth Agency

MusaForum illustrates how museums can cultivate emerging professionals by providing sustained opportunities for students to plan programs, interpret specimens, and facilitate public dialogue. The developmental progression observed in this study—where university students transition from learners to mentors and support high school participants—demonstrates a form of "scaffolded responsibility" that extends beyond traditional museum education programming.

This learning trajectory aligns with existing research characterizing museums as spaces for meaning-making, identity formation, and collaborative knowledge construction. By positioning university students as facilitators and co-learners, museums shift from delivering content to enabling learners to generate and communicate their own interpretations. The Kiso Horse Project, in turn, shows how such mentorship enhances high school students' inquiry skills, critical thinking, and interpretive capacity. Together, these programs exemplify how museums can integrate youth agency and human-resource development into their institutional mission.

IV-2. Museums as Holistic Learning Environments: The Role of Well-Being Support

The study also underscores the importance of attending to learner well-being. Building on the concept of Museum Bathing,[22] the initiatives examined here demonstrate how museum settings can serve as third places[23]—supportive environments outside of home or school where students can reflect, seek guidance, and navigate challenges.

University staff and MusaForum mentors provided structured opportunities for dialogue and reflection, reducing stress and creating psychological safety during hands-on, public-facing, and field-based activities. The environment was intentionally shaped to help students process difficulties, maintain motivation, and sustain long-term participation. Museums are increasingly expected to function not only as educational or exhibition spaces, but also as third places where learners can reflect, share concerns, and engage informally in a supportive environment.[24]

These findings suggest that well-being is not an adjunct to museum learning but a structural condition that enables learners to engage fully in participatory and inquiry-driven activities. Future museum education programs may benefit from explicitly incorporating reflective practices and mental health support as part of their pedagogical design.

IV-3. Youth Participation as a Driver of Community and Cultural Sustainability

Youth participation in these initiatives also contributed to broader social and cultural goals. Both university and high school students produced public-facing materials—traveling exhibitions, multi-sensory displays, posters, and photographic documentation—that facilitated intergenerational dialogue and expanded public understanding of science and heritage.

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The Kiso Horse Project particularly demonstrates how engagement with local cultural resources can cultivate a sense of responsibility toward regional identity and cultural preservation. Students connected biological knowledge with historical and cultural narratives, resulting in exhibits that invited visitors to reconsider the significance of the Kiso Horse in contemporary society. This orientation resonates with Iwasaki's[25] work on the role of museums in fostering civic engagement and community-based cultural learning.

Taken together, the findings indicate that youth–curator initiatives can strengthen the relationship between museums and their surrounding communities by creating platforms where young people contribute substantively to cultural transmission and public knowledge.

IV-4. Toward a Sustainable Model of Youth-Curator Education

Across these domains, the analysis suggests a sustainable model for museum education in which:

1. Young people are empowered as active curators, exercising decision-making, interpretation, and reflective skills appropriate to their developmental stage.

2. Museums function as holistic learning environments, integrating participatory, experiential, and inclusive practices with attention to learner well-being.

3. Student-centered projects contribute to scientific literacy, cultural understanding, professional skill development, and community engagement, thereby extending the educational and social impact of museum practice.

By combining participatory learning, reflective practice, and well-being support, museums can cultivate empowered, responsible, and skilled young learners. The multi-layered youth–curator model demonstrated in this study offers a pathway toward more inclusive, sustainable, and community-connected museum education.

V. Conclusion

This study highlights the educational and societal potential of engaging youth as active curators in museum settings through an analysis of MusaForum and the Kiso Horse Project. The findings demonstrate that when students are empowered to plan, implement, and reflect on exhibitions and research activities, they develop autonomy, collaborative skills, inquiry abilities, and cultural understanding.

By integrating participatory learning with deliberate attention to students' mental well-being, museums can function as holistic educational environments that nurture both intellectual growth and personal development. The initiatives further illustrate how university students can serve as effective mentors for younger learners, forming a developmental continuum of participation that extends the educational capacity of museums.

Moreover, the results indicate that student-centered, practice-based projects contribute meaningfully to community engagement, heritage preservation, and the broader societal role of museums. In this sense, the multi-layered youth curator model presented in this study offers a practical and transferable

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framework for connecting museum education with regional culture and social sustainability.

In sum, museums that support youth as active curators can serve as dynamic spaces for learning, cultural production, and social impact. Such approaches offer a sustainable direction for museum education in which learning, creativity, and community engagement are mutually reinforcing.

Acknowledgements:

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Endnotes:

1 The *Museum Act* (1951) defines the roles and functions of museums in Japan. *Article 3* of *Chapter I* specifies that museums are institutions that collect, preserve, and exhibit materials, conduct research, and utilize these activities for educational purposes. This article establishes the legal foundation for positioning museums as both educational and research institutions.

2 Kurita 2019, chapter 1.

3 Kurata 1989, pp. 1–32. On p. 10, *kyoiku fukyu* is rendered as "educational propagation" in English, reflecting traditional one-way knowledge transmission.

4 See Tansei Institute Co., Ltd. 2011. This report summarizes the status of museum educational dissemination projects and approaches to museum educator training. See also Japan Association of Museums 2020. On p. 14, the report notes that 45.2% of museums do not have a dedicated education section or assigned staff, highlighting that in Japan, curators and educators are not clearly separated, and curators typically handle educational dissemination activities.

5 Ito (1991) proposes the concept of third-generation museums in Japan, emphasizing citizen participation and sustained intellectual engagement; Inaniwa and. Ito (2018) discuss participatory, citizen- and student-led museum practices—such as the Tobira Project—that exemplify characteristics often associated with fourth-generation museums, in which learners and community members actively shape educational and exhibition activities. See Ito 1991; Inaniwa, Ito 2018.

6 Dewey's theory emphasizes learning through active, reflective engagement, highlighting the role of experience in education. See Dewey [1899] 2019; [1916] 2019.

7 Piaget 1929. Piaget's work explores how children construct their understanding of the world, emphasizing stages of cognitive development and the active role of the learner.

8 Kolb 1984. Kolb's theory presents the experiential learning cycle: learners move through concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation, emphasizing learning as a continuous process grounded in experience.

9 Barrows, Tamblyn 1980. This work introduces the concept of problem-based learning, originally developed for medical education, emphasizing learning through the active resolution of real-world problems and fostering self-directed, collaborative learning skills. Its principles have influenced problem-based learning approaches across disciplines.

10 Perry 2020, pp. 117-122. Perry outlines project-based learning as a student-centered approach where learners work on real-world projects over extended periods. The approach emphasizes collaboration, problem-solving, and critical thinking, fostering both engagement and skill development.

11 Chatterjee, Hannan 2015. This edited volume explores the theory and practice of object-based learning, highlighting how engaging directly with physical objects can deepen understanding and memory retention.

12 See Hein 1998; Falk, Dierking 2013. Hein emphasizes how museum learning is experiential and constructivist, highlighting the role of visitors' prior knowledge, social interactions, and active engagement in constructing meaning. Falk, Dierking highlight how museums can support learning through workshops, participatory programs, and hands-on experiences, using the Contextual Model of Learning, considering personal, sociocultural, and physical contexts.

13 UNESCO (2024), *Framework for Culture and Arts Education* (Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, 15 February 2024), accessed September 2, 2025, https://www.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2024/02/WCCAE_UNESCO%20Framework_EN_0.pdf; OECD, *Future of Education and Skills 2030/2040*, accessed September 2, 2025, https://www.oecd.org/en/about/projects/future-of-education-and-skills-2030.html; ICOM (2022), *Museum Definition*, accessed September 2, 2025, https://icom.museum/en/resources/

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standards-guidelines/museum-definition/.

14 Nakadaira 2014. Similar participatory projects, such as the Togabi Art Project in which junior high school students independently organized and exhibited artwork, illustrate middle school learners acting as “kid curators” in educational contexts.

15 MusaForum is a university student-led organization at Nagoya University Museum. It presents its mission as exploring what it truly means to be a museum that makes a meaningful impact and translating that understanding into action, with a vision to unlock new possibilities and value within the museum.

16 Umemura, 2024; Demachi *et al.* 2024. The studies highlight university student-led, participatory activities that bring museum collections into the community for educational purposes.

17 Umemura, Nishikawa, Sankoda 2025.

18 Keller 1987. Keller proposes the ARCS model—Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction—as a framework for designing learning experiences that foster and sustain learners’ motivation.

19 Ogawa 2017. Ogawa discusses museum education as a communicative practice, highlighting interaction and dialogue between museum staff and visitors as key elements of learning.

20 Nonaka’s 1991. Nonaka introduces the concepts of tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge. In organizations, tacit knowledge is shared through dialogue, observation, and collaborative practice, and this sharing is central to the creation of explicit knowledge, forming a cycle that drives knowledge creation and innovation.

21 Umemura, Yamamoto 2024.

22 Ogata 2023. Ogata describes efforts to scientifically demonstrate, in collaboration with museums nationwide, that visitors can experience restorative or soothing effects in museum spaces, and discusses how this “Museum Bathing” initiative contributes to creating new value for museums.

23 Oldenburg [1989] 2023. Oldenburg introduces the concept of the “Third Place”, referring to social environments outside of home (first place) and work (second place) where people can gather, interact, and build community. Such spaces support informal social connections, casual conversation, and a sense of belonging.

24 Umemura 2025. The paper describes the installation of a self-measurement blood pressure device and brief mood questionnaires in the museum, revealing that some visitors expressed vulnerabilities, highlighting the museum’s value as a third place for visitors.

25 Iwasaki 2012. Iwasaki emphasizes that the transmission of intangible cultural heritage to future generations requires conscious choices both by individuals and by groups.

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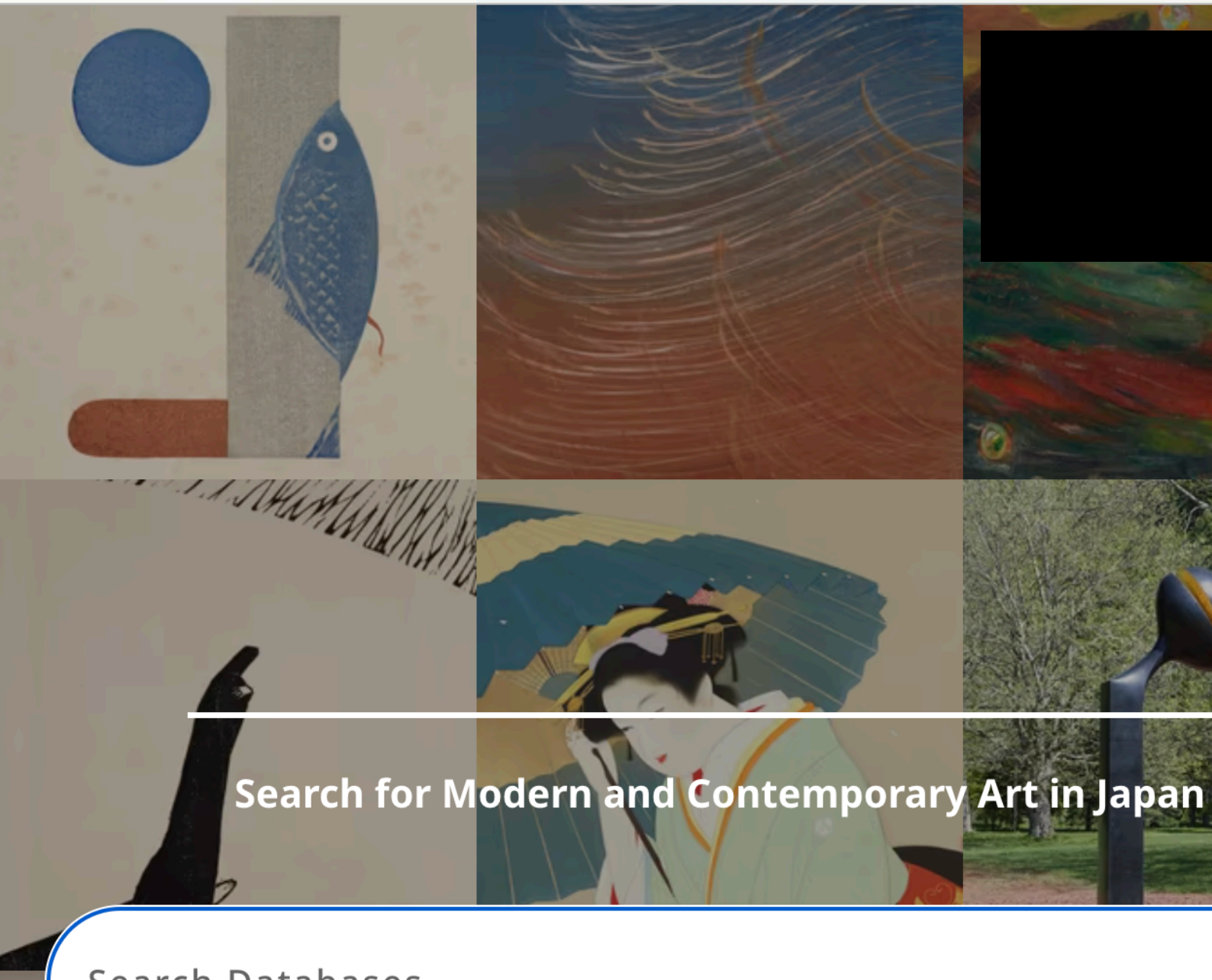
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ART PLATFORM JAPAN



Search for Modern and Contemporary Art in Japan

Search Databases

Artists
5,400+

Collections
473,000+

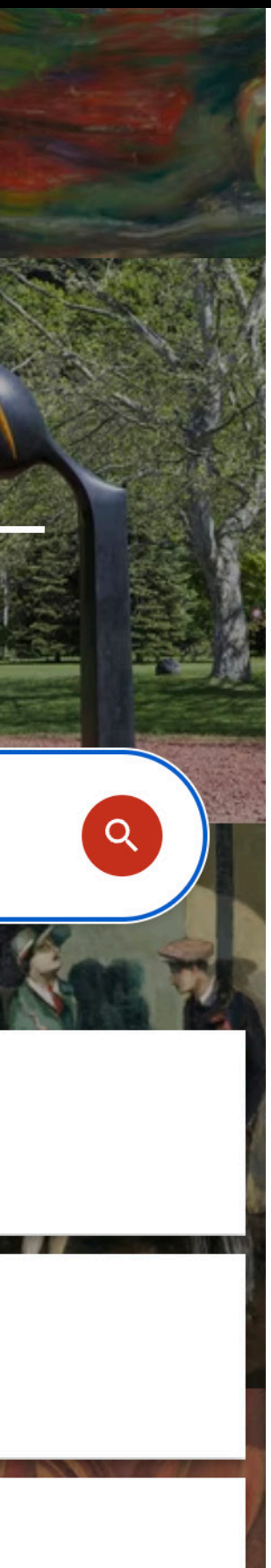
Museums
220+

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

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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,

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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*

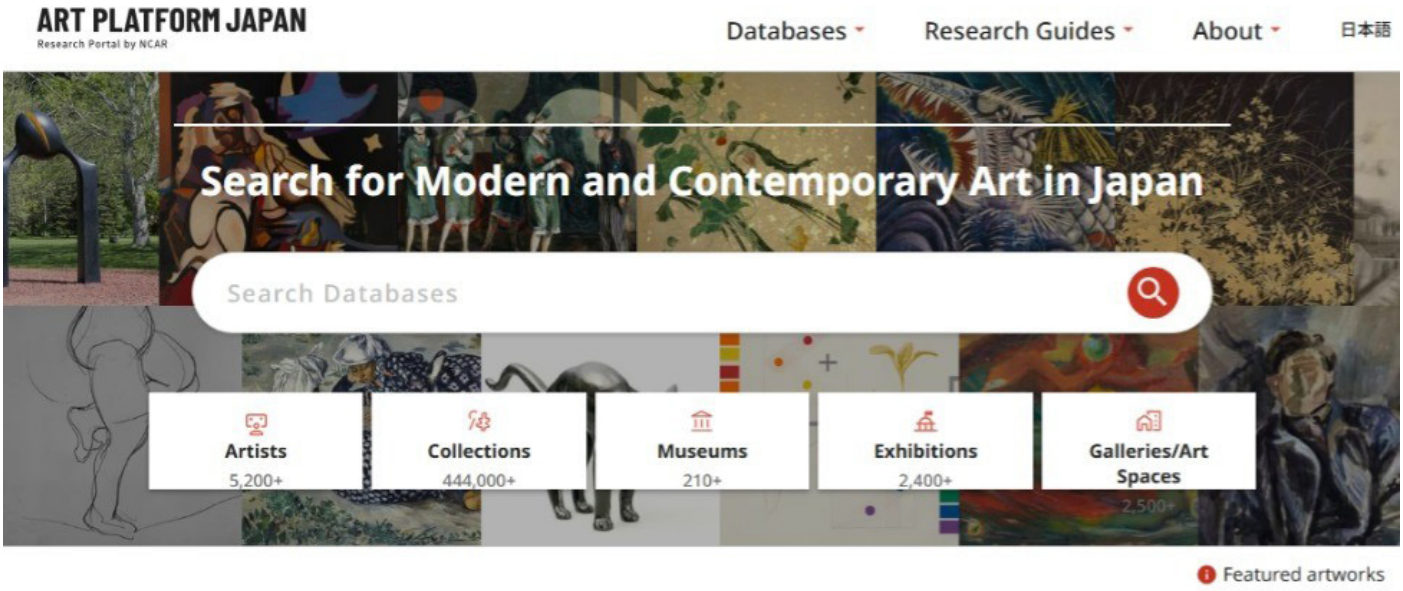
Inadequacies in information infrastructure for Japanese art are evident in multiple areas. Art dictionaries and biographical references often lack sources or citations, limiting verifiability and reusability. For instance, even *Kindai Nihon Bijutsu Jiten* (Dictionary of Modern Japanese Art),[15] a standard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

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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
- The 1980s
- Photography and media
- State and ecology

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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-

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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 Society[26] 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-

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mation management transcending institutional types and regions have been established, such as *SPECTRUM* by the UK's Collections Trust[29] 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 Act[33] 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

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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

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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 discussed 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-

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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 databases[40] 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.

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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 international 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* database[42] 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-

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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-

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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 hereditary 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.

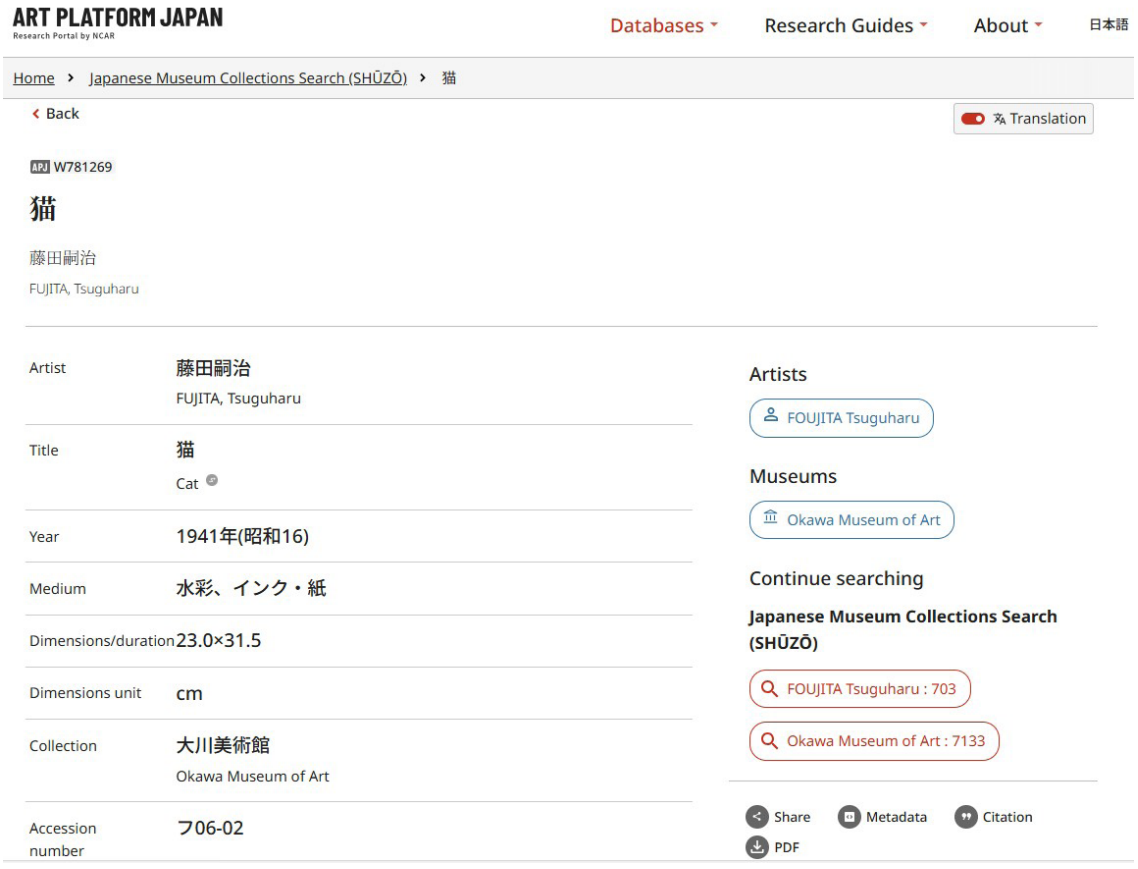
Through APJ's aggregation of information, collections in regional museums that were previously difficult to access are now available for reference and loan in international exhibitions. Museums have reported that making their collections searchable through SHŪZŌ led to loan inquiries. For instance, one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

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2

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



3

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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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 accumulated 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

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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.

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

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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/booksrske/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.catalogueraisonne.org/.

17 https://icra.art/.

18 Yashiro 1932, p. 3.

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24 ARLIS/NA (Art Libraries Society of North America) and ARLIS/UK & Ireland are independent professional organizations dedicated to art librarianship.

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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.

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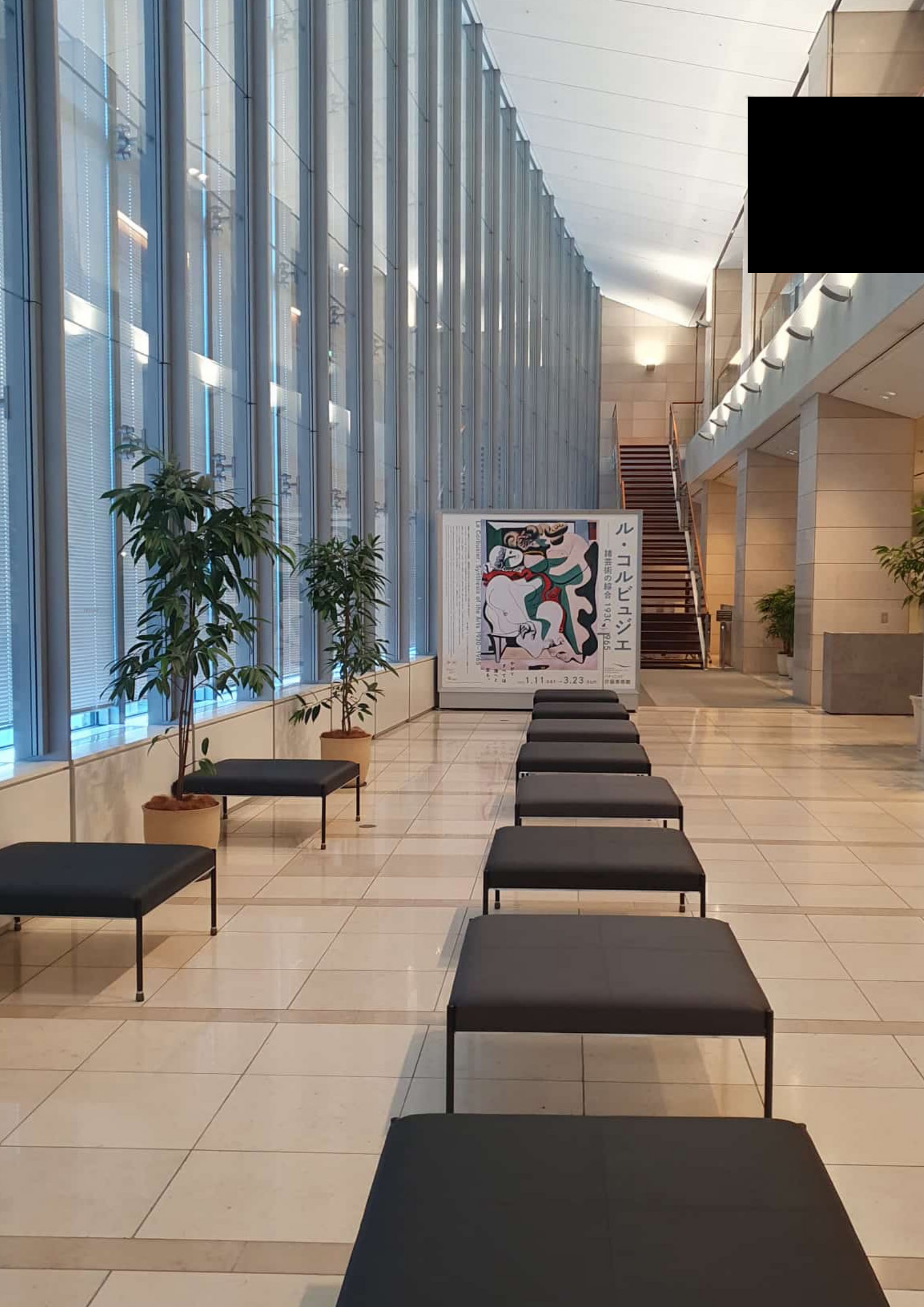
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ル・コルビュジエ
Le Corbusier, Synthesis of the Arts 1930–1965

Corporate Art Museums in Japan

Robert Maximilian Woitschützke

Keywords:
Corporate Collections; Corporate Museums; Patronage; Economy; Mori; Seibu; Panasonic



ABSTRACT:

This article traces the evolution of corporate art patronage in Japan, from early 20th-century department store exhibitions to contemporary corporate museums, in three distinct phases. Beginning in the 1930s, department stores such as Mitsukoshi and Daimaru organized exhibitions that celebrated traditional Japanese crafts - some of which were documented in the diaries of Bruno Taut. Applied arts also featured prominently in Charlotte Perriand's 1941 exhibition *Selection, Tradition, Creation* at Takashimaya Tokyo, where they were displayed alongside fine art. However, it was not until 1953 that painting and craft were explicitly placed on equal footing in Perriand's *Proposal for a Synthesis of the Arts* - a title borrowed from Le Corbusier. From the 1970s onward, a new model of corporate engagement emerged with the rise of private art museums. The Seibu Museum - located within the Seibu Department Store in Ikebukuro - became an influential private art institution of its time. Active during Japan's period of rapid economic growth, the museum sought to intertwine art, commerce, and everyday life. Though it closed in the 1990s, its legacy continues through the Sezon Museum of Modern Art in Karuizawa. The article concludes by examining the role of contemporary corporate museums in Japan, including the Panasonic Shiodome Museum of Art and the Mori Art Museum. It considers how these institutions continue to shape the intersection of commerce, art, and public engagement in a period marked by shifting economic realities.

L'articolo ripercorre l'evoluzione del mecenatismo artistico aziendale in Giappone, dalle esposizioni nei grandi magazzini dei primi del Novecento fino ai musei d'impresa contemporanei, articolandosi in tre fasi distinte. A partire dagli anni Trenta, grandi magazzini come Mitsukoshi e Daimaru organizzarono esposizioni che celebravano l'artigianato tradizionale giapponese. Le arti applicate furono protagoniste anche nell'esposizione del 1941 di Charlotte Perriand, *Selection, Tradition, Creation* presso Takashimaya Tokyo, dove venivano presentate accanto alle belle arti. Tuttavia, solo nel 1953 pittura e artigianato furono posti esplicitamente sullo stesso piano nella *Proposal for a Synthesis of the Arts* di Perriand. A partire dagli anni Settanta, emerse un nuovo modello di coinvolgimento aziendale con la nascita di musei d'arte privati. Il Seibu Museum, situato all'interno dei grandi magazzini Seibu a Ikebukuro, divenne una delle più influenti istituzioni artistiche private dell'epoca. Attivo durante un periodo di rapido sviluppo economico del Giappone, il museo mirava a intrecciare arte, commercio e vita quotidiana. Sebbene abbia chiuso negli anni Novanta, la sua eredità prosegue attraverso il Sezon Museum of Modern Art a Karuizawa. L'articolo si conclude analizando il ruolo dei musei d'impresa contemporanei in Giappone, tra cui il Panasonic Shiodome Museum of Art e il Mori Art Museum, esaminando come queste istituzioni continuino a modellare l'intersezione tra commercio, arte e coinvolgimento del pubblico in un periodo segnato da forti cambiamenti nelle dinamiche economiche.

Opening Picture:

Fig. 5: Lobby of the Panasonic Shiodome Museum of Art, situated within the Panasonic Shiodome Building in Tokyo. Copyright R. Woitschützke.

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Art and economy share a fundamental similarity: both rely on creativity. Although a substantial body of research has explored their connections, they are often still perceived as "distinct realms" that should not interfere with one another. If understood instead as two aspects of life that can mutually enrich and influence each other, Japan offers a compelling example in the form of a distinctive institution: the corporate art museum.

Many visitors to Tokyo are familiar with names like the Mori Art Museum, the Mitsubishi Ichigokan Museum, or the Suntory Museum of Art. Some may also recognize the Sompo Museum, the Panasonic Shiodome Museum of Art, or (at least the true aficionados) the Okura Museum of Art. As different as they all might be, these institutions share – as their names in many cases suggest – a common background: they are connected to or operated by private enterprises, some of which are household names around the globe. Unlike Europe, where culture until today remains largely a public affair, in Japan commercial corporations have shaped the cultural landscape for decades. There are similarities to the American system of private cultural patronage, but Japan differs markedly in that private enterprises operate their own institutions and in the sheer extent of this corporate engagement in the arts.

On the following pages, we will look at *corporate art museums* in Japan. The subject has not been widely researched, and those studies available usually focus on corporate museums that display product lines or illustrate the history of a specific enterprise, mostly written by researchers in the field of marketing. Art-historical observations on the subject of corporate art museums in Japan in the English language are, to my knowledge, not yet available.[1] It is clear that the topic is immense, and a detailed study would necessitate large-scale research in a field where sources are often difficult to access, since companies are not obliged to share sensitive information such as visitor numbers, expenses, or even internal branding strategies. Thus, this text can only provide a general outlook on the subject and raise awareness for an aspect of Japanese cultural life that is probably not too familiar to most Western audiences.

Most of these institutions are located in Tokyo, reflecting Japan's strong cultural and economic centralization. Only a few notable examples, such as the Menard Art Museum, Nagoya, or the Sagawa Art Museum, Shiga, are found outside the capital. The author, having himself worked in Japan for three years as a research fellow at the National Museum of Western Art, draws much of his information from his time as a guest curator at a prominent Japanese corporate art museum.

Hybrid Nature

Around the globe, commercial enterprises often engage in cultural efforts, sponsor cultural events, or collect works of art. Companies operating independent cultural institutions are less common, yet not completely unheard of – think, for example, of the *BMW Museum* in Munich or *World of Coca-Cola* in Atlanta. Such corporate museums, in which the products or services of the respective enterprise are pre-

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sented, are also common in Japan.

"Corporate museums occupy," writes Kim Lehman, "a difficult and little-understood position, straddling both the cultural and traditional world of the public museum and the profit-motivated and ever-changing business world."[2] How little understood this phenomenon really is becomes obvious in the case of the corporate art museums in Japan – spaces that transcend the ordinary idea of a corporate museum for products or services and instead boast art collections of great quality and have achieved global recognition for the excellence of their exhibitions.

While sponsors of high-profile cultural events in Europe often try to maintain a *low profile*, Japanese corporate art museums often retain a distinct corporate character and sometimes even help to promote or at least reflect the products, services, and values that the operating company represents. Their hybrid nature seems to reflect both commercial strategy and a sincere engagement with the arts.

The Beginning: Exhibitions at Department Stores

To begin with, one should recall that the idea of a public museum as an institution accessible to everyone for learning or enjoyment was brought to Japan in the wake of the Meiji Restoration. Certainly, emperors and feudal lords collected art long before this, but these collections were usually not publicly shown. With the arrival of the idea of the public museum, people had the chance to inform themselves about aspects of the world in a *Western* fashion. At the same time, *Western* art and culture began to be regarded as prestigious, as did Western-style production of goods and consumerism. It was in this industrialized, capitalist environment that the idea of the corporate museum emerged.

It was also the time when the so-called Japanese *Zaibatsu* system began to take on gigantic dimensions – corporate conglomerates that combined myriads of sub-companies interconnected in complex ways.[3] It is interesting to note that many Japanese corporate art museums are directly linked to one of these conglomerates (nowadays called *Keiretsu*) – take, for example, the Mitsui Memorial Museum or the Mitsubishi Ichigokan.

Yet before corporate art museums emerged at the scale we nowadays observe, there were their predecessors: the department store exhibitions. The German architect Bruno Taut, who lived in Japan from 1933 to 1936, wrote about exhibitions of works of applied art that he saw in Japanese department stores, and indeed, it is fair to regard those commercial venues as among the birthplaces of Japanese modern cultural life. Contrary to Western perceptions, department stores were never considered *second-rate* venues, nor substitutes for *real* museums. The rise of department stores in Japan paralleled the country's transformation into an economic powerhouse, and as Japan embraced capitalism in its own distinct way they became symbolic stages for displaying both artistic value and national ambition.

Taut described several of those department store displays in his diaries. For example, in his diary from

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24556

1933, he refers to exhibitions in the department stores Mitsukoshi and Shirokiya in Tokyo. His entry of 4 September refers to a display of objects of daily life from the *Kokuritsu Kōgei Shidōsho*, Sendai, at Mitsukoshi Department Store in Tokyo.[4] Another one, which Taut described in great detail, took place at Shirokiya and featured furniture, bamboo works, woven items, lacquer, ceramics, porcelain, iron, copper, jewellery, textiles, and lamps.[5] Most interesting, perhaps, are Taut's remarks on an exhibition he saw at Mitsukoshi, Tokyo, in September 1933, where he observed what he described as an "art department" that also featured works of "fine art" (paintings, etc.) next to works of applied arts.[6] Curious readers familiar with department stores in Japan will recognize that even today, major department stores have the uppermost floors devoted to such objects as well as art. What Taut observed was the beginning of a tradition that prevails until now, and it is also interesting to note that these displays did not differentiate between "fine art" and "applied art." Seeing things in unity was already present in these early department store shows and remains typical for Japan today.

The seemingly casual combination of fine and applied arts became a pivotal moment in two major exhibitions that could be regarded as influential prototypes for many subsequent developments in Japanese corporate art patronage. French artist and designer Charlotte Perriand created two exhibitions for the Takashimaya department store in Tokyo: *Selection, Tradition, Creation* (1941), which featured bamboo chairs and furniture alongside works by Léger, and *Proposition for a Synthesis of the Arts, Paris 1955. Le Corbusier, Fernand Léger, Charlotte Perriand* (1955), an exhibition title that Perriand borrowed from Le Corbusier's famous notion expressing the unity of all forms of visual expression.[7] Particularly the show of 1955 attempted, even more clearly than the one of 1941, to demonstrate how paintings, ceramics, and tapestries could be merged with daily objects, applied art, and interiors. As Katia Baudin puts it, Perriand's exhibition of 1955 reflected the Japanese societal and economic spirit of the time:

> *"Even though this exhibition was in keeping with her preceding projects, it fully reflected the socioeconomic challenges of the postwar reconstruction period, where countries – from France to Japan – found themselves torn between the desire to save their specific traditions and the need to adapt to the emerging challenges of globalization and the burgeoning consumer society."*[8]

Perriand's *Synthesis of the Arts* was a luxurious event, presenting major Western names to a striving consumerist society. The exhibition was conceived in the sense of a classical show of "high art," a carefully crafted event that adhered to all standards of a museum exhibition. It is here that the borders between a "department store display" and a carefully curated "serious art exhibition" began to blur and were ultimately overcome.

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Fig. 1: A postcard sent by Charlotte Perriand to Le Corbusier with an interior shot of the exhibition Proposal for a *Synthesis of the Arts, Paris 1955. Le Corbusier, Fernand Léger, Charlotte Perriand*, held at Takashimaya Department Store, Tokyo, 1955. In the background Le Corbusier's tapestry "Les Huit". © Fondation Le Corbusier.

Robert Maximilian Woitschützke
Corporate Art Museums in Japan

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Summarizing the above, one could conclude that both the department store displays witnessed by Taut in the 1930s and 1940s and, subsequently, Perriand's two ambitious shows for Takashimaya laid the groundwork for what corporate museums would later institutionalize: a cultural interface where commerce and art would unite, and where the characteristic Japanese approach toward the unity of fine and applied art would find enduring expression.

The Seibu Museum: Prototype of a Corporate Art Museum

The story of the development of Japanese corporate art museums is not a linear one. Private art museums were founded before department stores became prominent cultural hubs. One example is the Okura Museum of Art on the premises of the Hotel Okura, an art museum founded in 1917 that is loosely linked to the Taisei Kensetsu Construction Company (which, in its own regard, holds one of the world's great collections of paintings by Le Corbusier, though they are rarely publicly exhibited) and in which a private collection of paintings, calligraphies, and decorative arts from Japan and other Asian countries is presented. Museums such as the Okura always catered to a more specialized domestic audience, and it was not until much later, in the 1970s, that Japan began to appear on the international map of contemporary art. This shift began with the Seibu Museum, which operated from the mid-1970s until 1999.

Indeed, the story of corporate art museums in Japan cannot be told without the Seibu Museum of Art, later renamed the Sezon Museum of Art.[9] Opened in September 1975 on the upper floors of the Seibu Department Store in Ikebukuro, Tokyo, the museum was a state-of-the-art experiment: a department-store-run art museum devoted to international modern and contemporary art that would employ full-time curators and reflect the latest trends in infrastructure, equipment and marketing.

At the time of its founding, Japan had no major museum dedicated to international contemporary art. The National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo focused largely on domestic modernist painting and sculpture, but did not provide a platform for the newest international or conceptual developments. The Seibu Museum filled this void. It systematically introduced cutting-edge international movements to Japanese audiences well before the major public museums did.

From the start, the museum's program was ambitious. Just one year after its opening, it organized a large-scale *Kandinsky* exhibition (January–February 1976) that drew massive crowds and confirmed the museum's ability to present major historical retrospectives. Among the most progressive undertakings—still remembered vividly by Japanese art lovers of the time—was probably the exhibition *Joseph Beuys: An Exhibition on the Ulbricht Collection* held in 1984. Beuys, who agreed to the exhibition in exchange for support for his *7000 Oaks* project and who travelled specifically to Tokyo for the opening, was filmed during his eight-day visit; the video recordings were only rediscovered a few years ago.[10] During his time at the Seibu Museum, where *Coyote*

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2

Fig.2: The Okura Shukokan as it appears today in its modern surrounding adjacent to Okura Hotel, Tokyo. Initiated in 1917, it is generally regarded as Japans first private art museum. Although not directly linked to a corporation, the museums founder, Okura Kihachiro (1837–1928) operated the Okura-Gumi Zaibatsu which is regarded the predecessor to the current Taisei Kensetsu Construction Company. © Akio Kiihara.

III was performed in collaboration with Nam June Paik, Beuys heavily criticized Japanese society for what he believed to be reckless materialism and stressed that only the unity of the "rationalistic" West and the "spiritual" East could save future generations. It is highly questionable whether his remarks were based on a solid understanding of Asian culture, and seen from today's perspective, it is almost ironic that an artist like Beuys—an ardent critic of capitalism—would exhibit his work in an institution located inside a department store, the epitome of capitalist consumer culture.

Nevertheless, exhibitions like the one on Beuys were cutting-edge undertakings and helped to grant the Seibu Museum international recognition. From what can be observed today, its activities were not simply acts of "cultural benevolence" but part of a strategy to position its operator, the Seibu Group, as a tastemaker for a new urban middle class. Yet this strategy was inseparable from a genuine intellectual engagement with contemporary art. It is clear that showing artists like Beuys was hardly reducible to simple corporate branding in the classical sense.

By the late 1990s, however, the bursting of Japan's economic bubble brought this experiment to an end. In February 1999, the Seibu Museum closed. In its twenty-four years of operation, it had staged exhibitions on a scale unmatched by other corporate museums of the time and left a deep imprint on Japan's cultural infrastructure. Its program anticipated debates about the privatization of culture that would become a nationwide phenomenon only later. The legacy of Seibu continues today in the Sezon Museum of Modern Art in Karuizawa, which grew out of the Seibu corporate collection.

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3

The Current Situation

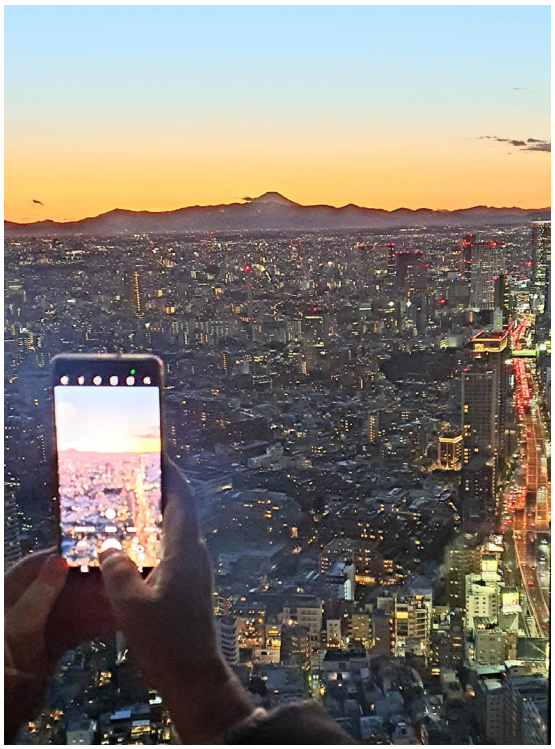
It is fair to say that the Seibu Museum marked the beginning of a development the results of which are now coming to full fruition. Today, independently operated museums shape the cultural skyline of Tokyo, making it one of the most culturally diverse and vibrant art cities in the world. The variety of private venues creates what could be described as a stimulating competition: It remains characteristic of Japan that there exists a seemingly endless number of medium-sized private museums, but rarely a single large central institution that absorbs the majority of visitors. Even the Tokyo National Museum, the country's largest, focuses primarily on domestic or Asian topics and leaves ample space for other institutions to flourish. The National Museum of Western Art, where the author of this text worked for three years, may be the largest museum dedicated to Western art in Japan, yet it has no monopoly on the subject and attracts a different audience than, for example, the Mori Museum, with its contemporary approach to merging urban life, art, and architecture that has become almost synonymous with Tokyo in the eyes of foreign visitors.

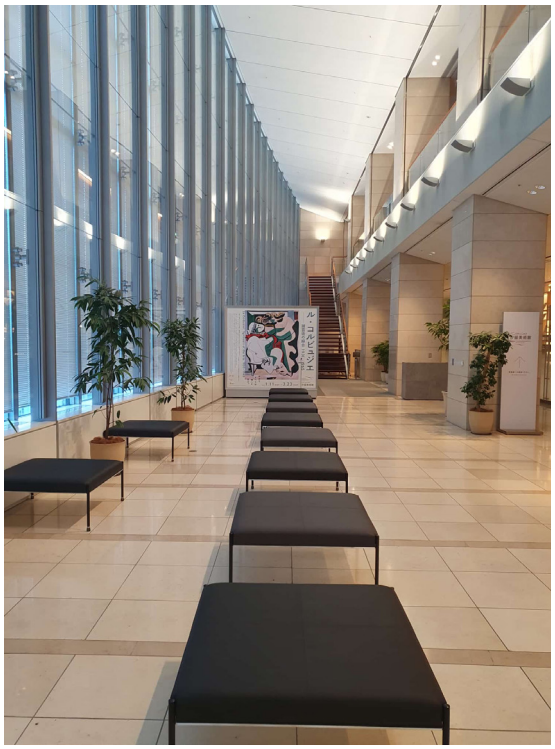
The Mori Art Museum, founded in 2003, is certainly among the best-known museums for both domestic and foreign audiences and one of the most striking examples of a recently established corporate art museum. From its inception, it was conceived not merely as a space for collecting or exhibiting art, but as the centerpiece of a comprehensive urban philosophy. Its founder, Minoru Mori, was deeply influenced by the work of Le Corbusier—whom he greatly admired and whose works he collected—and sought to realize a contemporary vision of an environment where art, architecture, and urbanism would merge.

To illustrate this idea one could say that the Mori Museum shifted from

Fig.3:
Interior View of the Seibu Museum in Ikebukuro (Undated, prior to 1989). The Museum operated until 1999 and was a forerunner among Japanese corporate art museums. Note that paintings are exhibited behind ceiling-high glass vitrines, which is usually typical for the exhibition of Japanese hanging-scrolls (so-called kakejiku). © Norihiko Matsumoto; Photo courtesy of Sezon Museum of Modern Art.

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24556





4 - 5

Fig. 4: View of Shinjuku from Roppongi Hills Mori Tower. The observation deck, located on the same floor as the Mori Art Museum, has become one of the most visited tourist destinations in the capital. Copyright R. Woitschützke.

Fig. 5: Lobby of the Panasonic Shiodome Museum of Art, situated within the Panasonic Shiodome Building in Tokyo's redeveloped Shiodome district—a rare example of an office complex transformed into a cultural destination. Copyright R. Woitschützke.

classical cultural philanthropy to what may be described as *urban branding*. The Tokyo Mori Tower in Roppongi constitutes a "vertical city" that offers everything from leisurely shopping and entertainment on the lower floors to cultural experience, learning, and aesthetic enjoyment at its top. It is probably fair to say that the name "Mori," known primarily through the Mori Building Company—Japan's largest real estate developer—has achieved its international recognition largely through the museum that crowns its flagship development on the 53rd floor together with an observation deck.

While the Mori Museum represents a model of cultural engagement tied to urban development and lifestyle branding, the Panasonic Shiodome Museum of Art illustrates a different approach. It follows a more classical museum concept, focusing on high-quality exhibitions devoted mainly to French art and design—fields in which it holds an internationally recognized collection of works by Georges Rouault. Yet the museum's location is revealing: it occupies the upper floors of the same building that houses the Panasonic Showroom, where visitors can experience and test the company's latest products. The visitor can move almost seamlessly from contemplating a Rouault painting to exploring a newly designed lighting system or kitchen appliance. Here, the proximity of art and technology, aesthetics and commerce, is not hidden but made explicit. The museum itself also serves as a place where the abilities of the owning company's technological devices, such as advanced spotlights, can be demonstrated.

Both the Mori Museum and the Panasonic Shiodome Museum of Art show how Japanese corporate museums have evolved along distinct but related trajectories. The Mori Museum attempts to integrate art into the fabric of the city itself; the Panasonic Museum, on the oth-

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24556



6

er hand, maintains the integrity of a more traditional art museum while situating it within the ecosystem of corporate innovation and product design. Together, they exemplify the ongoing dialogue between art, commerce, and everyday life that has characterized Japan's cultural landscape since the time of the department store exhibitions that I have described at the beginning of this text.

Closing

Of course, Japan's largest art museums have always been, and still are, those run by governmental institutions on the regional, prefectural, or national level. However, drawing a clear line between public and private philanthropy in Japan is not always easy. Many major public cultural institutions regularly cooperate with private enterprises—such as newspaper companies—to realize large projects. This should not be confused with classical patronage or *mécénat*, since the sponsoring companies may also benefit financially from such collaborations in cases of major success. Given that blockbuster exhibitions at Japan's leading museums can still attract up to 400,000 visitors, the sale of tickets, catalogues, and merchandise can generate considerable revenue. Adding to this the rise of corporate art museums since the 1970s, one may raise a delicate question: is the corporation, rather than the state, the true cultural actor of modern Japan?

A particular closeness between large enterprises and government circles has long been observed in Japan—most visibly in the case of the advertising conglomerate Dentsu, which has repeatedly been linked to government contracts and Liberal Democratic Party campaigns.[11] However, it is probably irrelevant what the case may be here. What matters is the fact that corporate

Fig. 6:
View of the exhibition Le Corbusier: Synthesis of the Arts 1930–1965 at the Panasonic Shiodome Museum of Art. © Panasonic Shiodome Museum of Art / Photo: Nacasa & Partners.

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art museums in Japan flourish and demonstrate great flexibility. They have proven their ability to adapt quickly to current trends and to execute projects with a speed that is remarkable in a country often perceived as bureaucratically rigid. [12]

Finally, a few remarks concerning possible conflicts that may arise in the context of corporate art patronage. Critics of corporate patronage in favor of public institutions may argue: if public art museums are operated by commercial enterprises, how can it be guaranteed that their programs serve the public good rather than the interests of the company behind them? Why should a corporation, whose primary purpose after all is to generate profit, engage in activities that seem altruistic? Could the privatization of culture not even pose a potential threat, since private operators are under no obligation to install "guardrails" or to adhere to the standards of taste and responsibility that public institutions are expected to maintain? Would such corporate institutions not have the power to act tendentiously, or to give in to populism? Could they not even engage in activities that society might reject?

Indeed, this touches a sensitive point. Theoretically, a corporate art museum could act in this way. But one must ask: why would it wish to do so? Visitors are not forced to go to a museum—they choose freely what they want to see, and in a city like Tokyo, with its abundance of cultural venues, the options are endless. Corporate art museums in Japan must attract public interest to cover at least part of their exhibition costs. In this sense, their freedom is more limited than that of public institutions that rely on a steady flow of tax money. To function, they must positively attract public attention. Any other approach would mean offering something for which there is no demand—and thus inflicting harm on themselves. In the worst case, to alienate the public could even result in people boycotting or sanctioning the operator by simply ceasing to purchase its products. The conclusion is evident: the company would suffer, and so would its museum. In that sense, the public's freedom of choice acts as an informal but powerful corrective mechanism.

Another aspect to be mentioned in this context is the idea of *shakaiteki kouken* (social contribution), which plays a crucial role in Japanese society. Companies are expected to demonstrate their value beyond economic performance, and operating an art museum has become one visible way to do so. This often aligns with practical considerations such as optimizing corporate resources or taxation. In that sense, corporate art museums serve both as expressions of social responsibility and as discreet instruments of economic strategy.

Regardless of one's opinion on corporate art museums, their story, at least in Japan, seems to be far from over. Recent developments such as the *MORI Building DIGITAL ART MUSEUM* have even redefined what a museum can be, offering immersive experiences that merge technology, art, and entertainment to an extent that the term "museum" may no longer apply in the classical sense.[13]

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Endnotes:

1 One of the more recent looks on the subject may be found in “Corporate Mécénat Activities Supporting Japanese Fine Arts with a Focus on Crafts – As a Bridge Between Tradition and Modernity” by Tsugumi Kondo, Association for Corporate Support of the Arts, 2022. https://www.mecenat.or.jp/en/wp-content/uploads/Corporate-Mecenat-Activities-Supporting-Japanese-Fine-Arts-with-a-Focus-on-Crafts.pdf. The focus here, however, is on crafts rather than on the history of corporate art museums itself.

2 Lehman, Byrom 2007.

3 For more information on the development of the Japanese Zaibatsu System, refer to Ohno 2018, p. 41 and pp. 87–88.

4 Speidel 2013, p. 110.

5 Speidel 2013, pp. 117–118.

6 Speidel 2013, p. 123.

7 For the exhibition of 1941, refer to Kikuchi 2019, pp. 273–292; For the exhibition of 1955, refer to Baudin 2019, pp. 311–329.

8 Baudin 2019, p. 311.

9 Information on the Seibu Museum used in this article derives from the website of Sezon Museum of Modern Art: https://www.smma.or.jp

10 For information on Joseph Beuys at Seibu Museum, consult the exhibition “Joseph Beuys. 8 Tage in Japan und die Utopie Eurasia”, held at Hamburger Bahnhof – Galerie der Gegenwart, October 2011 until January 2012. https://www.smb.museum/ausstellungen/detail/joseph-beuys-8-tage-in-japan-und-die-utopie-eurasia/.

11 See, for instance, “Japan Awarded More than 100 Contracts over 10 Years to Dentsu-Linked Non-Profits.” *Reuters*, December 30, 2020. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-japan-dentsu-contracts-idUSKBN2950BS.

12 Those interested in the recent development of corporate cultural patronage in Japan may refer to the annual surveys of the Association for Corporate Support of the Arts, published under https://www.mecenat.or.jp/en/publication/press-release.

13 Readers interested in the latest applications of technology in Japanese Corporate Museums (as to date of the publication of this article) may refer to the following communiqué by the World Economic Forum (WEF): https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/12/the-role-of-corporate-art-museums-in-fostering-cultural-connection-in-japan/.

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Career Transitions for Museum Curators in Japan: A Case Study

Mari Watanabe

Keywords:
Museum curator; Career transitions; Interview; Qualitative and quantitative research; Museum Act

ABSTRACT:

The aim of this study was to identify the actual conditions and factors of career transitions in the career development of Japanese museum curators. Questionnaires (135 respondents) and semi-structured interviews (52 respondents) were conducted with experienced curators, and SCAT analysis was used to examine the structure of career transitions. The interviews revealed that many of the narratives were based on self-efficacy, «don't give up», and showed autonomous career restructuring due to professional identity and psychological capital, even under institutional constraints. On the other hand, the 'lack of room' symbolised by 'lack of time, manpower and budget' constrains curators' competence building and training opportunities. Curatorial career stability is essential for maintaining the quality of museum activities, suggesting the need for redesigning institutional support and ongoing research.

L'obiettivo di questo studio è identificare le condizioni reali e i fattori che caratterizzano le transizioni di carriera (career transitions) nello sviluppo professionale dei curatori museali giapponesi. Sono stati somministrati questionari (135 rispondenti) e condotte interviste semi-strutturate (52 rispondenti) a curatori esperti; l'analisi SCAT è stata utilizzata per esaminare la struttura delle transizioni di carriera. Le interviste hanno rivelato che molte delle narrazioni si fondavano sull'autoefficacia, sulla volontà di "non arrendersi", e mostravano una ristrutturazione autonoma della carriera grazie all'identità professionale e al capitale psicologico, anche in presenza di vincoli istituzionali. D'altro canto, la "mancanza di spazio", simboleggiata da "carenza di tempo, personale e budget", limita le opportunità di formazione e costruzione delle competenze dei curatori. La stabilità della carriera curatoriale è essenziale per mantenere la qualità delle attività museali, suggerendo la necessità di ripensare il supporto istituzionale e promuovere una ricerca continua.

Mari Watanabe

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I. Background and Purpose

I-1. Research Background

I am interested in the career design of curators working in museums.[1] This is because, even during the period when lifetime employment was common in Japan, curators were observed not only building their careers within a single organization but also moving to other museums or transitioning to other professions-such as university faculty, -by leveraging their curatorial experience. This represents a unique approach to career formation compared with typical workers in for-profit organizations. It contrasts sharply with the career path of university faculty as professionals, for whom it is common to complete a doctoral program, obtain a degree, and then proceed directly into teaching. The fact that some individuals become university faculty in specific fields after gaining experience as curators is also distinctive from the perspective of university academic career formation.

Thus, curatorial career development is distinctive not only compared to typical workers in for-profit organizations but also with other professional roles (research positions). It is characterized by frequent occurrences of what management studies terms “career transitions.”

“Transition” denotes a “turning point,” “pivotal moment,” or “shift.” Research on “career transitions” focuses on these pivotal moments or milestones occurring during the transition process in professional life, examining the nature of decision-making involved in such choices.[2] Management studies pursue ways to effectively manage organizations in changing environments using the four resources of people, materials, money, and information. Within this field lies the research domain concerning human resource management and careers. Therefore, this study adopts museum studies as its primary disciplinary framework and incorporates concepts from career research in management studies as an analytical lens, thereby taking an interdisciplinary approach.

The total number of curators in Japan, as well as those assigned to individual institutions, remains small.[3] Consequently, research on their careers has not been sufficiently accumulated, and there is a pressing need to visualize the current situation.

Japan’s Museum Act, which defines museum activities, was enacted in 1951. Over 70 years have passed since then, and as societal conditions have changed, the roles and functions expected of museums have diversified and become more sophisticated. Particularly since the 2017 amendments to related laws[4] and the 2022 revision of the Museum Act (effective 2023), emphasis has been placed on advancing the digital archiving of museum materials and utilizing museum collections in line with the spirit of the Basic Act on Culture and the Arts.[5] The scope of museum activities has broadened, and the capabilities required of curators have changed and expanded. Conversely, a fundamental review of the curator system itself has been postponed.

Meanwhile, a review of the curator system itself has been postponed, and structural issues have been

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identified, such as unclear appointment and positioning, and an increase in non-regular employment. In this environment, it is important to visualise curators' career paths, prevent mismatches after employment, and attract talented individuals.

According to the 2019 Comprehensive Survey of Japanese Museums, 43.9% of museums employing full-time curatorial staff hire fixed-term employees.[6] One reason for this practice is the introduction of the Designated Manager System.[7] When museum operations are managed by a fixed-term designated manager, employment under that arrangement must necessarily be time-limited. Additionally, the recent trend of raising the mandatory retirement age has led to cases such as the re-employment of retirees, which also involves fixed-term contracts.

Analysis indicates that 41.8% of full-time curatorial staff at public museums are fixed-term employees, with directly managed museums employing 14.1% and designated management museums employing 33.6%—indicating a higher proportion of fixed-term employees at designated management museums.[8] This represents a decline in the stability of professional positions.

Furthermore, non-regular curators predominantly hold short-term contracts ranging from one to five years. Such brief employment periods make it difficult to accumulate expertise and to undertake continuous specialised tasks within museum operations.

These changes in the employment structure may foster a tendency to undervalue curators' expertise. In recruitment for non-regular staff, there is a strong emphasis on "immediate contribution" and "work experience." Among curatorial duties, exhibition planning and educational outreach activities require continuous project development and relationship-building with diverse stakeholders such as owners and local communities. Short-term contracts for non-regular staff may hinder their ability to undertake such responsibilities effectively. If this situation persists, there is a significant risk of undermining the fundamental functions of museums.

Furthermore, the treatment of non-regular staff, including retirement benefits-tends to be inferior to that of regular staff. This makes it difficult to maintain motivation as professionals, raising concerns that the loss of talented and enthusiastic personnel will accelerate. Particularly concerning is the decline in motivation among younger generations, which could lead to insufficient personnel for shaping cultural society in the future.

This situation also poses significant challenges from the perspective of curatorial career development. It involves a disruption of professional expertise due to shortened contract periods and the lack of a promotional system. Being employed on a year-to-year contract renewal basis makes long-term career development difficult. Furthermore, many curators have no guarantee of re-employment after the termination of their contract, resulting in fragmented opportunities to accumulate expertise. This necessitates additional effort to deepen their skills as curators.

This issue affects the reliability and sustainability of museums as public

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institutions and requires resolution. Naturally, this demands systemic responses rather than relying solely on individual efforts by each museum.

I-2. Research Objectives

This study aims to clarify how curators navigate their career paths when facing turning points in their professional lives, and what factors influence their decision-making. This revision aims to clarify why curators are able to reconstruct their careers even under challenging working conditions. Specifically, it involves conducting semi-structured interviews with experienced curators to gather insights on career transitions. Additionally, a questionnaire survey was administered to former curators. This survey was conducted prior to the symposium "Curator Career Transitions: Cases and Their Merits and Demerits" (February 11, 2024, Osaka City University), organized by the Japan Art History Society's Museum Committee, which the author helped plan. This study analyzes the interview and questionnaire surveys conducted with former curators. Through both surveys, it depicts the characteristics of curators' career development from its early stages to turning points, their approach to dealing with contingency, and the influence of employment status and systems. In Japan, the curator training system has been administered in accordance with the Enforcement Regulations of the Museum Act, established in 1955.[9]

I-3. Prior Research

Career studies developed interdisciplinarily, tracing their origins to early 20th-century economic psychology. Research intensified from the 1970s onward, driven by growing organizational demand for human resources and expanding individual employment opportunities. For a long time, stable careers based on mutual loyalty between organizations and employees were assumed. However, following economic crises and environmental changes, theories focusing on individual careers have expanded.[10]

Specifically, regarding curators, one study examined the developmental process of curators in early adulthood through interviews, building on Levinson's theory of life-span development.[11] Furthermore, research papers on curators' careers are scarce, with only scattered studies on training programs and students' career perspectives.

Regarding career transitions, numerous studies have examined the transition from student to working adult. Research limited to specific occupations includes studies on career transitions for doctors and nurses,[12] and studies on career transitions for athletes like J-League players when they retire from competition.[13]

On the other hand, boundaryless careers[14] and protean careers,[15] positioned as new career theories, explain the contemporary tendency to autonomously shape careers across organizational boundaries. Toshihiro Kanai advocates for the simultaneous consideration of both the awareness of pivotal moments in Japanese career design and the utilization of serendipitous opportunities through drift.[16] He integrates this with frameworks such as Kran-

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nert's planned serendipity theory, Nicholson's transition cycle, Bridges' three-stage model, and Schlossberg's 4S model. This study draws on these theoretical perspectives to depict, through curators' narratives, the interplay of concrete turning points and preferences, institutional constraints, and serendipity.[17]

II. Research Methods

II-1. Research Design and Approach

The study adopts a mixed approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research. In this study, quantitative and qualitative approaches are employed in a complementary manner. Quantitative methods are used to analyze questionnaire survey data in order to identify overall trends, while qualitative analysis based on interview surveys examines how individual curators experienced career transitions within specific contexts shaped by values and constraints. Through this process, the meanings of career development and turning points are analyzed, and the underlying structure of career transitions is elucidated. However, qualitative data analysis (SCAT) is the main focus, while quantitative results are positioned as supplementary. Regarding mixed research methods, Fujita (2021) points out that quantitative and qualitative research have traditionally been divided, with qualitative research tending to be criticised from the perspective of scientific rigour. However, he states that no particular research method should be regarded as absolute, but rather that it is preferable to adopt mixed research methods that use multiple methods.[18]

As mentioned above, the survey was conducted in February 2024 and targeted curators and former curators across the country, with 135 valid responses. The questions asked covered a wide range of topics, including working patterns, experience of changing jobs, career satisfaction, evaluation of the curatorial system and future intentions. Simple and cross-tabulations were used for quantitative analysis.

For the qualitative research, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 52 respondents. Diversity in age group, gender, building type (public, private, university-affiliated, etc.), work history and experience of changing jobs were ensured and was based on theoretical sampling principles. With regard to the research participants, the primary focus was on curators or former curators who had experienced job changes—either transferring to another museum or moving to a different occupation. In addition, curators (and former curators) who had not changed jobs were also included. This design was adopted in order to compare differences in responses and coping strategies at moments of transition between those who changed jobs and those who did not.Interviews lasted 60-90 minutes and were recorded and transcribed verbatim, after which semantic units were extracted and conceptualised through SCAT analysis.

II-2. SCAT analysis

SCAT (Steps for Coding and Theorisation) is a qualitative analysis method by Hisashi Otani (2019) and is

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characterised by its ability to visualise the process of leading textual data to a theoretical description.[19] In this study, utterances related to career transitions were extracted from verbatim data and analysed in the following four stages:

1. extracting the words of interest from the text

2. paraphrase the word or phrase in other expressions

3. abstracting the paraphrase and organising it as a concept

4. integrating the relationship between multiple concepts into a theoretical description.

SCAT has an explicit, step-by-step analytical procedure, can be applied to relatively small data sets and is accessible to beginners. Another advantage is that the analysis process is visualised,[20] which encourages reflection by the researcher and facilitates third-party verification of the validity of the interpretations. In ensuring reliability and validity, emphasis was placed on ensuring procedural transparency through the SCAT table and the possibility of revisiting the analysis process.

The results of the analysis were organised around three main axes: 1) institutional constraints, 2) social contingencies and 3) personal values. The three analytical axes—institutional constraints, social contingency, and individual values—are not directly embedded in the procedural steps of SCAT itself. Rather, they were employed as an analytical framework at the stage of interpreting and organizing the results. It was found that the interaction of these factors shapes the turning points in curatorial careers.

III. Results

III-1. Questionnaire survey

As mentioned above, this survey was conducted on the occasion of the Symposium of the Japan Art History Society's Museums Committee, with the aim of ascertaining the current situation of how curators think about their career paths. The target group was those with experience of working as curators at museums in Japan.[21] An online questionnaire (Google Form) was used, and a link was sent by email to members of the society, and sponsoring organisations were also notified of the link. Responses were unsigned and email addresses were not collected; the survey was launched in January 2024 and as of 7 February, 135 had been collected.

III-2. Questionnaire Survey Results

(1) Sample Characteristics

[Age]A wide range from their 20s to 60s, with the largest group being those in their 30s at 32%. Others were 17% in their 20s, 23% in their 40s, 17% in their 50s, 10% in their 60s, and 1% in their 70s. This aligns with the fact that many curators hold graduate degrees and typically join institutions in their late 20s to 30s upon graduation.

[Gender]Male: 33%, Female: 66%, Other/No Response: 1%. This generally aligns with existing surveys on the gender ratio of museum curators (Male: 26%, Female: 74%).

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[Institution Type] Public institutions accounted for 58%, private institutions 18%, national institutions 11%, and others 13%.[22] While public institutions constitute approximately 75% of Japanese museums, this survey also reflects the high proportion of public institutions.

(2) Key statistical findings.

[Intention to change jobs] In the question 'Have you ever thought about changing jobs (e.g. to another museum or university)', 81% of respondents answered 'Yes' (Figure 1). The results suggest that changing jobs is a familiar option for curators, rather than a special one.

[Time of intention] The age group that considered changing jobs was concentrated in the 20s-30s, with 43 respondents in their 20s, 41 in their 30s, 17 in their 40s, 3 in their 50s and 1 in their 60s. In terms of length of service, a certain number of respondents were seen every year up to the fifth year, with the next peakin the tenth year. This concept can be interpreted in relation to the "exploration" and "establishment" stages in Super's theory of career development.

In the cross section by age group, those in their 30s had the highest level of intention, followed by those in their 60s. However, those in their 60s were more likely to be influenced by retirement planning, with younger people more likely to consider a career change. The impact of reality shock is also suggested.[23] However, attention should be paid to the reasons for having to move due to fixed-term employment.

In the question 'After thinking about changing jobs, did you actually change jobs or conduct a job search', 75% said yes and 25% said no (Figure 2). The rate of transition to actual action is high.

The proportion of respondents who

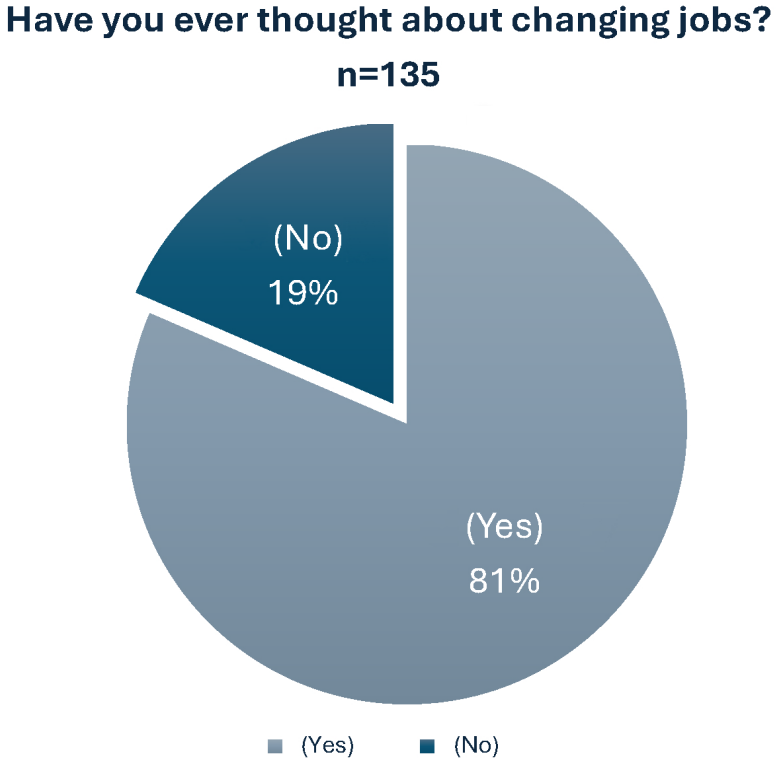


Fig. 1

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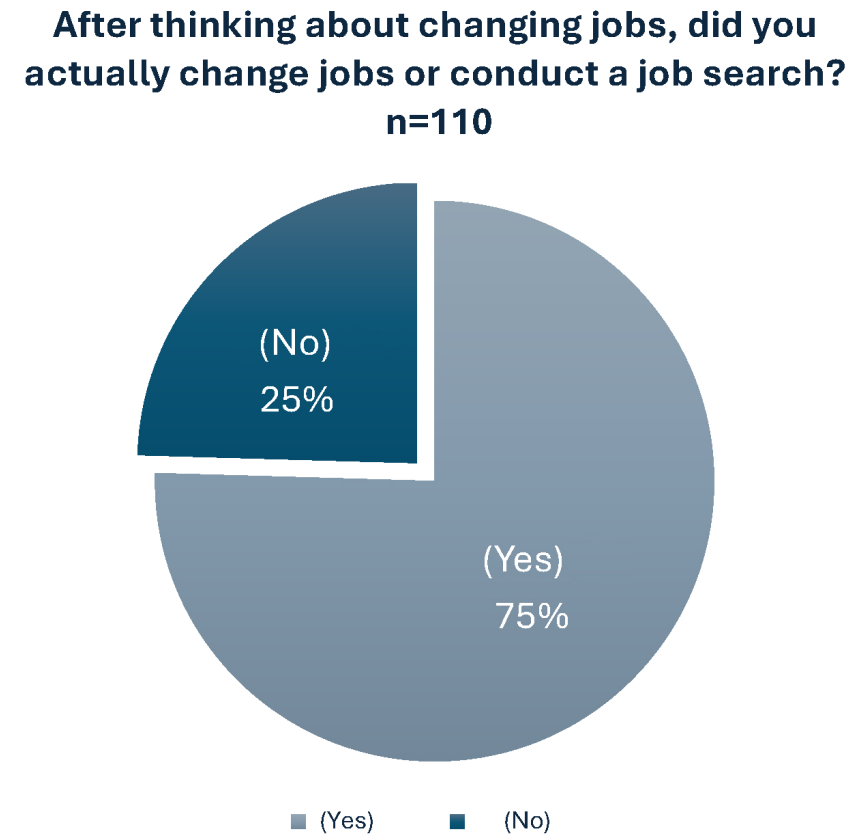


Fig. 2

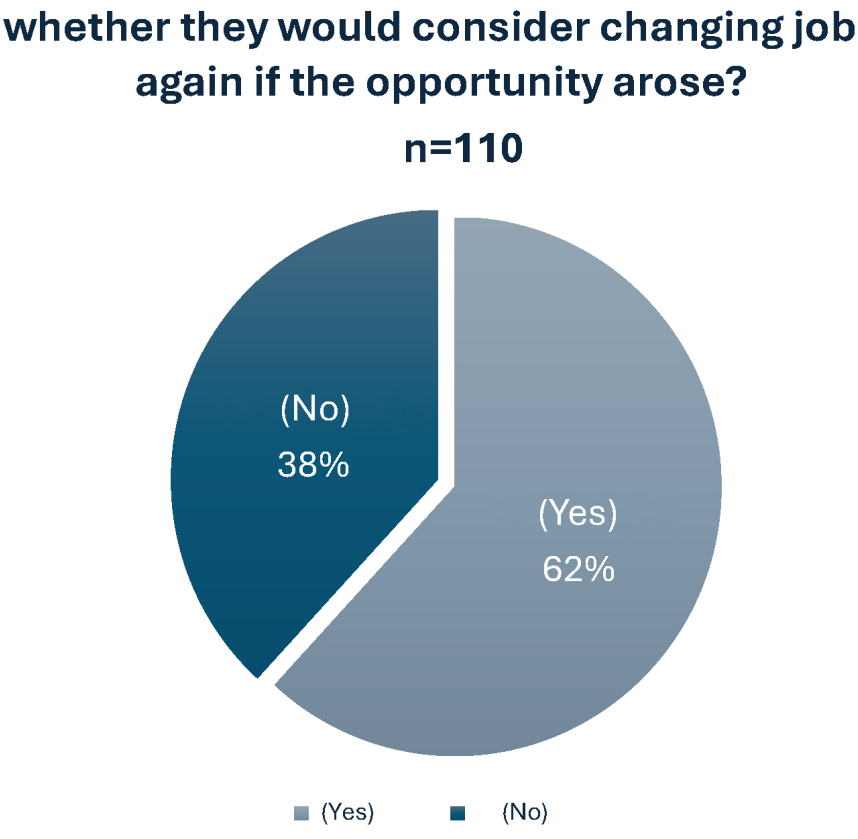


Fig. 3

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had changed jobs was 62% (yes) and 38% (no) when asked 'whether they would consider changing jobs again if the opportunity arose' (Figure 3).

(3) Analysis of free-text statements

To analyze the content of free-text responses, a co-occurrence network analysis was conducted as a method for visually representing which words tend to be used together within the textual data.

[General arrangement] The most common reason for changing jobs was "job content", followed by "human relations" and "research",[24] and then "contract (non-permanent and fixed-term)", "workload", "family", "benefits" and "local reasons", among others. On the other hand, the reasons for non-replacement were "satisfaction/satisfaction", "shallow tenure", "family", "satisfactory treatment", "local" and "research-enabling environment". With regard to the working environment of curators, the analysis identified several structural issues: (1) employment instability, (2) mismatches in job assignments, (3) the structure of workload burdens, (4) difficulty in securing time for research, and (5) challenges in balancing professional roles with everyday life. Through this analysis, the realities of non-permanent employment became clearly visible.

This study has limitations in that certain aspects could not be addressed in sufficient depth. These limitations are positioned as objectives for subsequent stages of research.

IV. Interview Survey

IV-1. Interview Survey

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to clarify the individual realities of curators' career development and career transitions. The perspective of critical realism was used as an aid, and transparency of reporting was ensured by referring to SRQR (Japanese version).[25] The main subjects were those who had changed jobs from museums to other museums, universities or other industries, including some who 'did not change jobs'. The fields of specialisation and types of museums were not narrowed down to ensure comparability.

Data collection began in December 2021 and ended on 21 July 2023, with a total of 52 cases. The interviews were conducted in meeting rooms or online, for 1-1.5 hours each time, and were recorded with consent. The language was Japanese. An interview guide was prepared in advance and validated in several pilots. The implementation of the study was not guided by the guide but respected the spontaneous speech of the participants. In terms of ethics, the purpose, scope of use, anonymisation, data management and erasure policies were explained and free-will consent was obtained.

For analysis, the recorded data were verbatim and entered into the SCAT table after a process of immersion in the data through repeated reading.

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IV-2. Interview findings

After extracting each utterance and paraphrasing / conceptualising it, patterns of career transitions were examined. The analysis resulted in the following five types of curatorial careers:

1. continuity type (continuing to work at the same museum while adapting to changes in duties)

2. Transitional (changing jobs to other industries or fields)

3. trans-boundary type (activities that span multiple fields, such as university, government, private sector, etc.)

4. value shift type (redefining roles and attitudes within the job)

5. family factor type (change of career due to marriage, childbirth, nursing care, etc.)

The analysis was organised from three perspectives: institutional and industry trends, socio-economic background and individual career events.

IV-2-1. Case study 1: Continuing careers: a fusion of ideals and autonomy

The woman had been familiar with the arts since childhood and wanted to become a curator at an early age, but as there were no curatorial courses at university, she devised a way to obtain a qualification. Participation in study groups of active curators led to networking and job opportunities. She went on to a master's degree while working part-time amidst family opposition and financial constraints and was employed after publishing in academic journals. After employment, she was approached by several people to change jobs but chose to continue in her current position after comparing research freedom, job satisfaction and compensation. In the future, she has plans to set up an organisation to support curators from the outside.

As an analysis, this is an example of a highly self-directed protégé career, combined with a boundary-less orientation that is willing to change jobs if the conditions are right. The characteristics of the Japanese curatorial system, where academic achievements are linked to employment, can also be confirmed.

IV-2-2. Case study 2: Transitional careers: redefining expertise

Through her experience as an educator, she was oriented towards museums as a place where she could utilise her own expertise. She emphasised access to job information and the use of her network and made the transition when the contingency opportunity of a vacancy due to her predecessor's illness coincided with a non-institutional scouting opportunity. After the transfer, he focused on on-the-job training, exhibitions, educational activities and the formation of a research infrastructure.

As an analysis, a career development at the intersection of insti-

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tutional opportunities (municipal appointment system) and contingencies/networks can be confirmed. Career persistence was observed, as the participants continued with related activities after retirement.

IV-2-3. Case 3. (Hybrid)

Cross-Border Career: Multiple Affiliations and Knowledge Circulation

Value Transformation Career: Process of Setbacks and Reattempts

Family-Factor Career: Balancing Life Events

The five types of curatorial careers identified in this study represent diverse forms of adaptation selected under conditions of institutional constraint, and not all interviewees fit neatly into a single type. Moreover, multiple states were often observed within the career of a single curator. In Case 3, for example, three types were identified concurrently.

Pursued undergraduate and graduate studies focused on contemporary art, but after experiencing rejection in job applications, followed her advisor's advice to gain experience at overseas museums. While enrolled in a doctoral program, she accumulated practical experience through museum part-time work and involvement in community art projects. However, she experienced a long hiatus due to dropping out, childbirth, and childcare. After returning to the field, shifted focus to education and outreach, pioneering a new specialized domain.

Analysis reveals: setbacks and interruptions became catalysts for creating new directions; self-direction and adaptability were exercised based on psychological success; psychological boundary-crossing occurred with role and domain transitions.

IV-2-4. Case 4: Value shift type

This case involves a transition from a different industry into a curatorial position. Subsequently, as the individual moved step by step across several roles within the same museum, a shift in work-related values was observed.

IV-2-5. Case 5: Family factor type

In this case, family-related factors were found to have influenced the timing and nature of a career turning point.

IV-2-6. Themes common across cases:

"Don't give up" and "No margin for error"

Many narratives repeatedly conveyed the message "Don't give up" to those following in their footsteps. This stems from a foundation of attachment and pride in their work, where professional identity is established through job experience. Conversely, the common refrain of "no leeway" (regarding time, personnel, or budget) highlights persistent organizational and systemic challenges that individual effort alone cannot overcome amid diversifying work demands. Insufficient training opportunities,[26] lack of research time, and difficulty accessing recruitment information amplify career fluidity and instability.

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V. Discussion

The quantitative–qualitative synthesis of this study reveals that curators' career transitions emerge from the interaction between external environmental factors (informalisation of employment, diversification of work, small organisational size, and dispersion of recruitment information) and internal factors (valuation of expertise, psychological capital, networks, and cross-border learning).

The intention to change jobs was as high as 81%, with actual job changes reaching 75%, and 62% expressing an intention to change jobs again. The main factors were job content, human relations, research opportunities, and the fixed-term nature of employment. This shows that job content and research environment carry greater weight among curators, while working conditions and human relations are common leading factors in the general labour market.

Free-text responses indicated structural problems such as non-regular, single-year contracts, non-specialist assignments, work overload, difficulty in securing research time, and challenges with work–life balance. On the other hand, the rationale for remaining in non-transferable positions was strongly linked to satisfaction, potential for professional growth, and regional orientation.

In the qualitative case study, curators demonstrated the process of developing new directions following setbacks and interruptions in their careers, revealing that psychological capital—hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism—was crystallised in the narrative of "don't give up." Academic achievements, knowledge gained through practice, and professional networks supported curatorial activities, and boundaryless movement across organisations, professions, regions, and employment statuses was observed. This illustrates how curators form self-directed careers within current institutional constraints. It became clear that curators, as professionals, undergo a competence-building process that serves as a driver for career transitions.

Conversely, the narrative of "not being able to afford it" referred mainly to a lack of time, lack of manpower, and lack of budget. Some interviewees described being assigned to curatorial posts and having to tackle a succession of tasks before they had acquired sufficient knowledge, skills, or information.

One expected outcome of improving the "can't afford it" situation is the implementation of initiatives to enhance the professional skills of curators. In museums with few staff and small budgets, it is difficult to release curators—who are among the few responsible for museum operations—for training courses. Financial constraints also make it challenging to fund such training. Nevertheless, some curators reported that participation in training fosters personal networking and creates horizontal links among curators. We believe that improvements to the "can't afford it" situation and increased opportunities for training could lead to a more comprehensive training programme, thereby supporting the acquisition of field-related skills.

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As Conclusion, recognising the importance of curatorial career stability for maintaining the quality of museum activities—particularly in light of the changing and diversifying roles required of museum research has been conducted to visualise the reality of curatorial careers. The emphasis has been on capturing and analysing how experienced curators perceive their careers as a series of transitions, and how they cope with them. It has been shown that curators shape their careers according to their individual professional identity and psychological capital, even within institutional constraints. Career transitions were categorised into five patterns.

Today, with increasing labour market mobility and the declining ability of organisations to fulfil their functions adequately, individual careers have become highly unstable. Precisely because of this situation, it is desirable to conduct further research on the careers of curators, who form their careers in a self-directed and independent. As a future task, this study should be expanded to examine the institutional nature of curatorial work and to promote a bridge between practice and policy.

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24557

Endnotes:

1 In this study, the term curator refers to professional staff members of museums as stipulated in Article 4 of Japan's Museum Act. According to the Act, curators are defined as those who are responsible for professional matters related to the collection, preservation, exhibition, and research of museum materials, as well as other activities associated with these functions.

2 Bridges 1980. Bridges' theory of transition is regarded as one of the foundational theoretical contributions to career transition studies and therefore serves as a key theoretical framework for this research. It is evident that career transitions have become increasingly common over the course of an individual's working life, and research on this topic remains active today. In a review of 93 academic articles, Jos Akkermans, Serge P. da Motta Veiga, Andreas Hirschi and Julian Marciniak point out that studies on career transitions have tended to focus theoretically on normative transitions, while paying limited attention to atypical or non-standard transitions, and that much of the existing literature concentrates on single, discrete transition events. In contrast, this study aims to carefully examine the multiple transitions that a single curator may experience over the course of a lifetime and to construct a coherent and integrative understanding of these processes. See Akkermans et al. 2024.

3 *From the Results of the 2021 Comprehensive Survey of Museums: The Actual Management Situation and Issues of Japanese Museums*, 2021, pp. 1-11. https://www.bunka.go.jp/seisaku/bunkashingikai/hakubutsukan/hakubutsukan01/05/pdf/92826001_02.pdf.

4 *Law Partially Amending the Basic Law for the Promotion of Culture and the Arts*, Agency for Cultural Affairs website, https://www.bunka.go.jp/seisaku/bunka_gyosei/shokan_horei/kihon/geijutsu_shinko/index.html.

5 *Agency for Cultural Affairs, Museums Comprehensive Website - Outline of the Amendment to the Law*, https://museum.bunka.go.jp/law/.

6 *Report on the Comprehensive Survey of Japanese Museums*, p. 80. https://www.j-muse.or.jp/02program/pdf/R2sougoutyousa.pdf.

The fixed-term employment refers to employment arrangements in which the labor contract specifies a termination date and does not guarantee continuation beyond the following fiscal or academic year, even in cases of renewal. In the context of curatorial employment, such arrangements typically take the form of non-regular, term-limited, or part-time positions. In public museums, a high proportion of curators are employed as fiscal-year-based contract staff.

7 The Designated Manager System is a system under which the management authority of public facilities established by local governments is delegated to private entities designated by those governments, with the aim of improving public services through the utilization of private-sector expertise. This system forms part of broader administrative reforms influenced by the global trend of New Public Management (NPM) and was implemented following revisions to the Local Autonomy Act in 2003. As a result, the diversification of managing bodies has progressed, leading to substantial changes in the employment structures of professional staff and in the underlying conditions for career formation. The system has also been introduced in museums, with around 27% of all public museums continuing to use the designated manager system. See Report on the Comprehensive Survey of Japanese Museums, p. 45. When operations were shifted from direct municipal management to private operators, personnel costs were curbed and the expansion of non-regular employment became widespread in some aspects.

8 Suginaga 2015, p. 12.

9 There are currently several means of obtaining curatorial qualifications. One is to complete credits at a university or junior college, or to pass the qualification certification conducted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. Since the 1970s, the number of museums has increased as the Japanese economy has grown.

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The number of curatorial qualifications obtained through curatorial training courses has also increased considerably. Students who follow the curriculum and receive a specialised education obtain the qualification of their dreams, but only a limited number are able to pass through the even narrower gate and obtain a curatorial position. These curators become valuable human resources who can play an active role in museum activities or continue to transmit information as cultural workers even after leaving the museum. The author is involved in this training system as a part-time lecturer.

10 Komatsu 2017.

11 Kanayama 2010; Levinson et al. 1962.

12 Yoshida 2010.

13 Kiyoshi, Kozaburo 2010; Ogawa 2009.

14 Arthur 1994.

15 Hall 2004.

16 Kanai 2010. Kanai, while influenced by Schein's career theory, developed his own unique theory depicting the transformation of labor in Japanese society. For Schein, see Schein 1991.

17 The following theoretical literature may also be consulted: Tsuruta 1980; Ishiyama 2024.

18 Fujita 2021, p. 55.

19 Otani 2019.

20 In SCAT, visualize refers to the structured process by which concepts are extracted through a step-by-step analytical procedure. In this sense, SCAT enables the visualization of career transition analysis.

21 In this study, the term museum refers to institutions as defined in Article 2 of Japan's Museum Act. According to the Act, a museum is an institution whose purpose is to collect, preserve, and exhibit materials related to history, art, folklore, industry, natural science, and related fields; to make these materials available to the general public with appropriate educational consideration; to carry out activities necessary to contribute to public education, research, and recreation; and, concurrently, to conduct research on these materials. This definition is also consistent with the internationally accepted definition of museums articulated by ICOM International Council of Mueseums.

22 In this study, the term public museum refers to museums established by local governments and includes both municipally operated museums and those managed under the Designated Manager System. By contrast, national museums refer to museums established by the national government and currently operated as Independent Administrative Institutions. The transformation of employment structures examined in this study has occurred most prominently within the public museum sector.

23 Reality shock refers to a phenomenon that anyone may experience shortly after entering employment. Although individuals begin their professional careers with ideals and expectations, they may encounter disappointment when the reality of work differs from what they had anticipated, or experience shock at the severity of conditions that do not align with their ideals. Ogata 2007, p. 14.

24 Research activities undertaken by curators can be broadly divided into two categories: research conducted as part of museum operations, such as studies of materials held in museum collections, and research in fields specific to curators that may have originated during their student years. In some cases, these two forms of research coincide, while in others they diverge.

25 SRQR (Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research) is an international guideline that specifies how qualitative research—such as interview studies, participant observation, and document analysis—should be reported in terms of structure and content. The

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Japanese version is a translation of the SRQR prepared for Japanese researchers and is commonly used as a checklist when writing qualitative research articles. In this study, Section 2 was developed in accordance with the topics addressed by the SRQR.

26 With regard to the training of curators, responsibility lies primarily with individual museums. After completing formal coursework in curator training programs and entering curatorial positions, curators may participate in training opportunities offered by the Agency for Cultural Affairs, prefectural museum councils, or museum-related professional organizations. However, participation in such programs is limited due to restricted capacity, resulting in relatively few opportunities. Furthermore, interview data revealed that curators are often overwhelmed by day-to-day museum operations, leaving them with little or no time to participate in external training programs.

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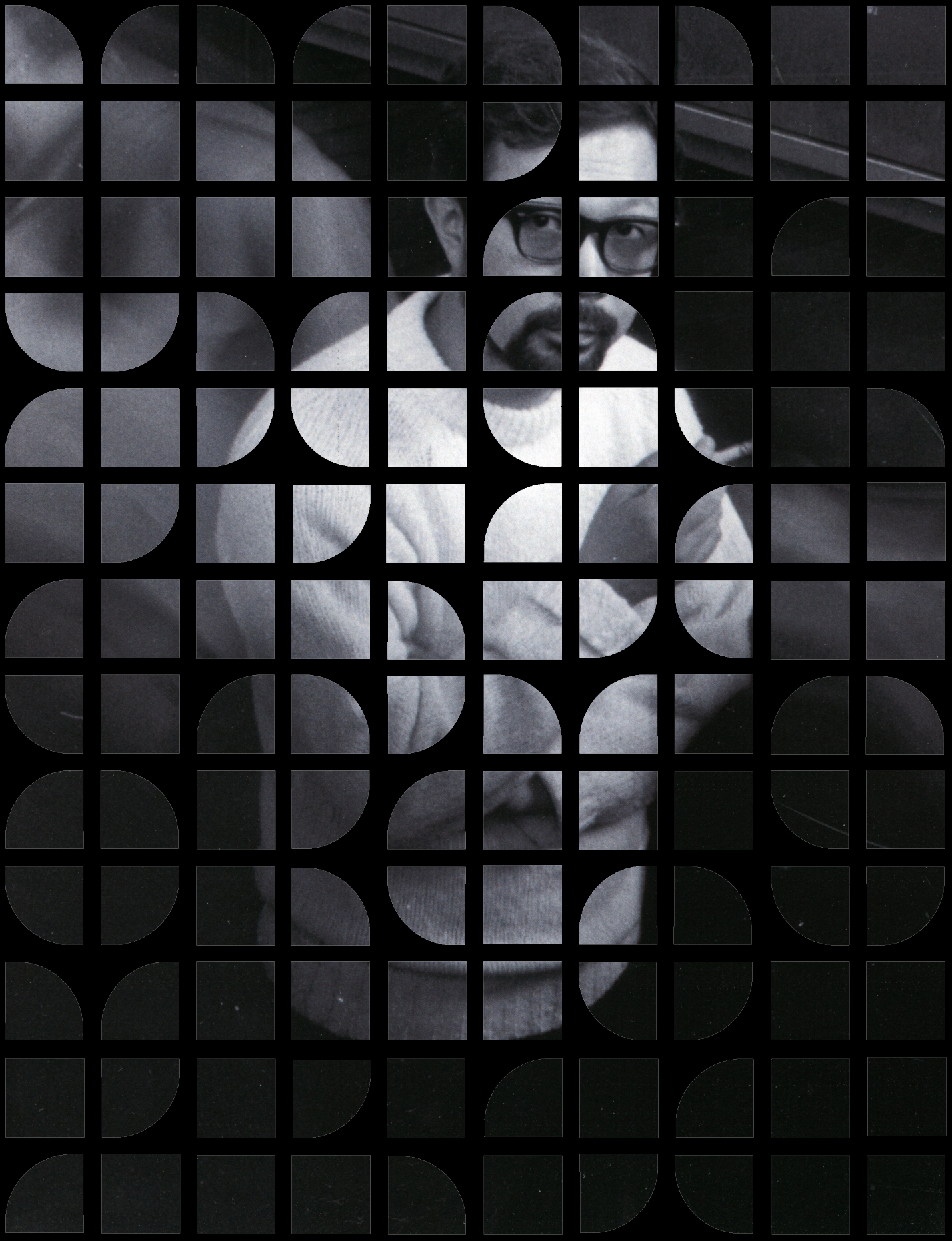
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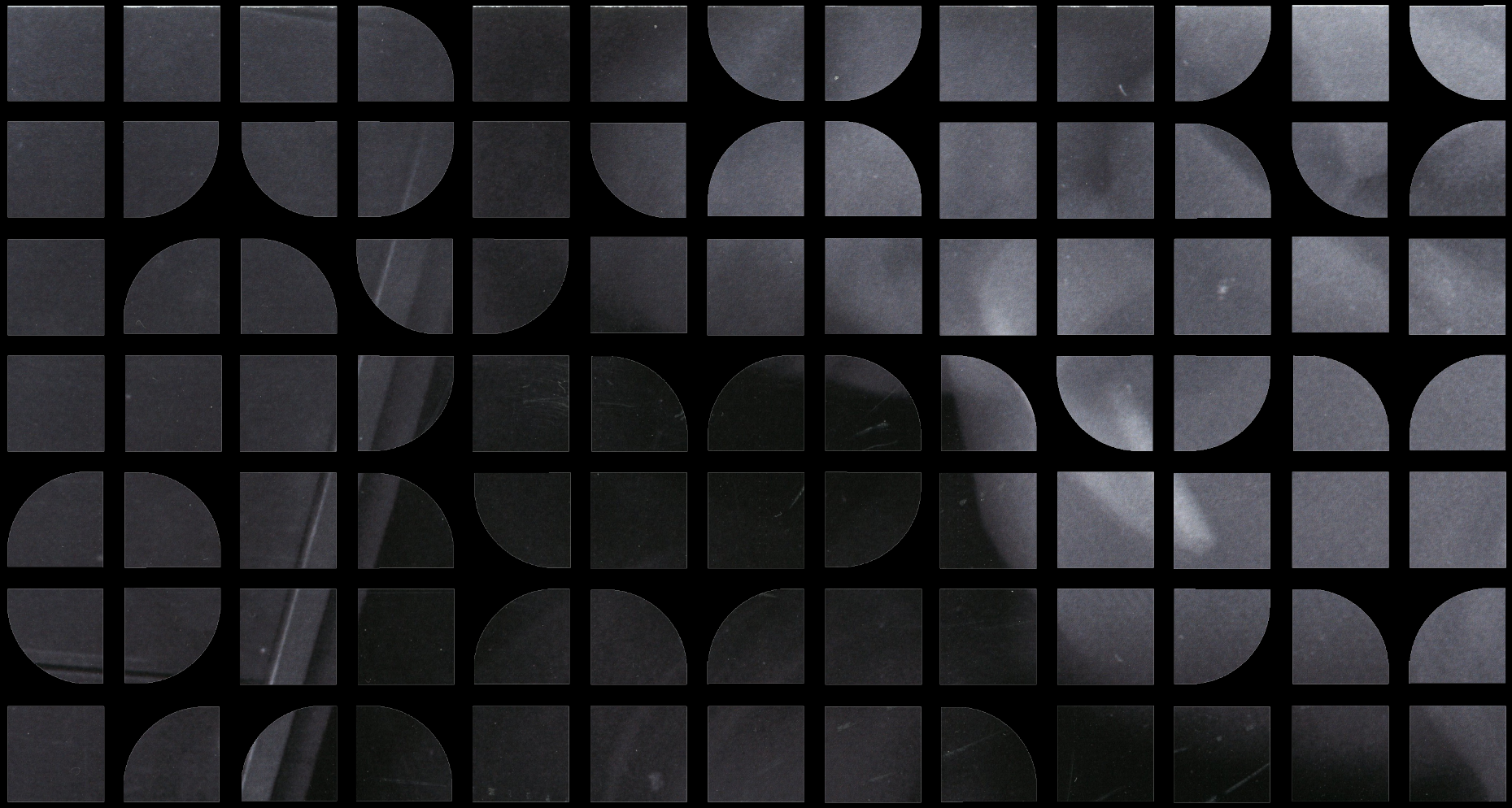
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materials.





製作 東

Shomei Tomatsu's Hikōki (Airplane): Rediscovery and Archival of the 16mm Film

Tomoko Araki

Keywords:
Shomei Tomatsu; Hikōki (Airplane) film; 16mm film; Film restoration and archiving; Visual cultural studies

ABSTRACT:

This paper introduces the recent rediscovery of the valuable film *Hikōki* (Airplane), shot by Shomei Tomatsu (1930–2012), one of the leading photographers of postwar Japan. In addition to providing an overview of the work, it also offers a brief report on the process of its digitization and the current state of the archival activities conducted at the artist's private studio, with which the author is directly involved.

Lo studio presenta la recente riscoperta del prezioso film *Hikōki* (Aereo), realizzato da Shomei Tomatsu (1930–2012), figura di spicco della fotografia giapponese del dopoguerra. Oltre a delineare una panoramica critica dell'opera, il contributo fornisce un resoconto sintetico del processo di digitalizzazione e dello stato attuale delle attività archivistiche condotte presso lo studio privato dell'artista, al quale l'autrice partecipa direttamente.

Opening Picture:

Fig. 3: Title page of Shomei Tomatsu, "IWAKUNI Iwakuni IWAKUNI: A Strange Reality Suddenly Given to Me, Which I Call Occupation - Iwakuni,Yamaguchi -".

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Introduction

This paper reports the recent rediscovery of the film *Hikōki* (*Airplane*) by Shomei Tomatsu (1930–2012: fig. 1), a photographer of paramount significance in postwar Japan, and seeks to provide both an overview of the work and essential information regarding its preservation and potential scholarly use. The film, produced in 1960, constitutes a rare and invaluable record of the contemporary environment and everyday life, thereby possessing substantial academic relevance within the field of visual and cultural studies.

Focusing on the newly recovered *Hikōki*, this study offers a concise account of its content and production context, while also detailing the processes of restoration and digitization. Furthermore, the paper addresses, insofar as pertinent, the current status of archival practices within the personal studio of the artist, in which the author has been involved. It should be emphasized that the principal aim of this study lies in the introduction and documentation of the film, as well as its preservation and transmission; detailed formal or aesthetic analyses of the film are deliberately deferred to future research.

The objectives of this paper are twofold. First, to render the content of the film comprehensible to readers through a systematic description of its sequence and the provision of illustrative figures. Second, to elucidate, from an archival perspective, the methods employed in its restoration and digitization, and to highlight the scholarly and practical significance of these processes.

The structure of the paper is as follows. It begins with an overview of the production period and situates *Hikōki* in relation to Tomatsu's *Occupation* series. This is followed by a detailed presentation of the film's content. The subsequent section reports on the restoration and digitization process. The paper concludes with a discussion of the prospects for the work's future archival utilization and its potential contribution to scholarly research.

The Production Period of *Hikōki* and Its Context within the Occupation Series

Due to space constraints, the full biography of Shomei Tomatsu will not be presented here; however, the following overview focuses on events up to the 1960s that are relevant to the present work.

Shomei Tomatsu was born on January 16, 1930, in Higashi-ku, Nagoya, Aichi Prefecture, as the second son of Shinsho Miyazaki and Tsuyuko Tomatsu. Around 1950, influenced by his elder brother, he began engaging with photography, borrowing a camera (Silver-Gelto) and taking his first photographs. He enrolled in the Faculty of Economics at Aichi University and joined the university's photography club. During this period, he exhibited works such as *Hiniku na Tanjō* (*Sarcastic Birth*) at the 2nd Aichi University Photography Exhibition, marking his debut as a photographer.

After graduating from Aichi University, Tomatsu moved to Tokyo in 1954 and joined the camera staff of Iwanami Shashin Bunko. That same year, he contributed to publications such as *Iwanami Shashin Bunko 124: Floods and the Japanese* and,[1] in 1955, to *Iwanami Shashin Bunko*

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165: The Town of Pottery—Seto.[2] In 1956, he left the company to work as a freelance photographer.

In 1957, Tomatsu participated in the exhibition *Ten Eyes* (Konishiroku Photo Gallery, Tokyo; May 10–17, 1957), curated by the critic Tatsuo Fukushima.[3] Other participants included photographers who would later co-found the group *VIVO* in July 1959: Kikuji Kawada, Akira Sato, Akira Tanno, Ikko Narahara, and Eikoh Hosoe.[4] In 1958, he received the inaugural Newcomer Award from the Japan Photographers Critics Association for works such as *Local Politicians*, and in 1959 he held his first solo exhibition, *Japan Series: People*, which earned him the 5th Mainichi Photography Award.

From 1960 onward, Tomatsu devoted himself to photographing U.S. military bases in Japan. This period also saw the creation of the *Senryō* (*Occupation*) series. He noted that his primary locations included Misawa in Aomori Prefecture; Yokosuka, Sagami-Otsuka, Chūō-Rinkan, and other areas in Kanagawa Prefecture; various locations in Tokyo including Tachikawa, Yokota, and Sunagawa; Sasebo in Nagasaki Prefecture; Chitose in Hokkaido; and Iwakuni in Yamaguchi Prefecture.[5] During this time, he was also commissioned by the Japan Council against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs to visit Nagasaki and photograph remaining war relics and atomic-bomb survivors.[6] Photographs from these sessions, together with Ken Domon's images of Hiroshima, were included in the Council's 1961 publication *Hiroshima–Nagasaki Document 1961*.[7] That same year, Tomatsu received the 5th Japan Photographers Critics Association Award for his work. Deeply affected by the devastation in Nagasaki, he developed personal connections with survivors and continued to visit and photograph the site throughout his life.[8]

As part of the *Occupation* series, Tomatsu also documented Okinawa during the 1960s, culminating in the publication of the photobook *OKINAWA Okinawa OKINAWA* (fig. 2),[9] produced by his self-established publishing company, Shaken, in 1967. Tomatsu's focus on "occupation" can be partly attributed to his birth in 1930 and his formative experience of defeat at the age of fifteen.[10] He himself explained: the area where he began photographing was a "base town" in Nagoya.[11] He stated as follow.

> *Because I started photography in that base town, whenever I opened my front door with a camera, there were U.S. soldiers everywhere. People made a living by doing business with Americans—women, mixed-race children born from relations with Americans lived nearby. Because I began photographing in such a landscape, every time I stepped outside and pressed the shutter, the American scenery was captured. Therefore, for me, the landscape of the base is the original scene, the primordial landscape.*

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24558



1

Tomatsu repeatedly emphasized his preoccupation with the occupation, stating in another contribution: "The defeat and occupation coincide with the period when one is most sensitive, the time of shedding one's boyhood and becoming a young adult. They thus constitute a major factor that shapes the course of one's subsequent life. In other words, the shadow of the war is my original landscape".[12] It should be noted here that Tomatsu does not take an antagonistic stance toward the United States. Immediately following this statement, he remarks that he likes both the country and its people, has fellow photographer friends in America, and feels a sense of hope in American democracy.[13]

From around 1960, Tomatsu began producing the photographic works collectively referred to as the *Occupation* series. To fully understand this series, it is necessary first to consider the historical referent of the term "occupation" within the context of Japanese history. In general usage, the Japanese "occupation" denotes the period of Allied governance that commenced with the signing of the Instrument of Surrender on September 2, 1945, and continued until the Treaty of San Francisco came into effect on April 28, 1952. Although the occupation was formally conducted under the auspices of the Allied Powers, it is important to note that, in practice, it was largely shaped and directed by United States policy. With the enforcement of the treaty, Japan regained its sovereignty, and under international law, the occupation was thereby considered to have formally concluded.

However, the historical and legal conclusion of the occupation did not necessarily entail a rupture in Japan–U.S. relations or a complete resolution of occupation-like conditions. Although the de facto occupation is generally understood to have

Fig. 1:
Shomei Tomatsu.

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24558



2

Fig. 2: Shomei Tomatsu, Book cover image of *OKINAWA Okinawa OKINAWA. Not a Base in Okinawa, but Okinawa in the Base*, Shaken, 1969.

ended with the treaty, the continued stationing of U.S. forces in Japan and the postwar security arrangements under the U.S.–Japan Security Treaty meant that American influence in Japanese society persisted in a sustained and structurally embedded manner. This influence extended beyond political and military spheres to encompass consumer culture, urban landscapes, and everyday life, penetrating Japanese society in ways that combined both positive and negative dimensions while interacting with indigenous social structures.

Tomatsu's deliberate use of the term "occupation" in the titles of his works directly reflects his own perception of postwar Japanese conditions. Notably, as discussed below, he published a work in *Asahi Camera* entitled "A Strange Reality Suddenly Given to Me, Which I Call Occupation," a formulation that is particularly suggestive. By employing this term, Tomatsu redefined an institutionally and legally concluded occupation as a concept in the present tense, continuing to designate the complex and ambiguous conditions under which Japan had been situated throughout the postwar period.

Thus, in the *Occupation* series, Tomatsu's use of the term "occupation" extends beyond a mere reference to the historical period of Allied governance. It may be understood as an expanded conceptual tool through which he critically visualized the pervasive presence of the United States in postwar Japanese society and the "strange reality suddenly given" that emerged under these conditions.

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24558

As will be discussed later, this film was screened on October 2, 1960—a period during which Tomatsu was deeply engaged with the theme of "occupation". That same year, he began publishing a series of works on the subject: in the January issue of *Asahi Camera*, he presented photographs taken in Yokosuka under the title *HARLEM (Black Quarter): A Strange Reality Suddenly Given to Me, Which I Call Occupation.*[14] This was followed by *Shisen* (*Gaze*)—photographs from Chitose (Hokkaido)—in the February issue,[15] and *Shūhen no kodomotachi* (*Children on the Periphery*)—taken in Misawa (Aomori)—in the March issue.[16] In April, he published *IWAKUNI Iwakuni IWAKUNI* (fig. 3) in *Chūō Kōron*,[17] featuring images captured in Iwakuni. Considering this timeline, it is reasonable to assume that the 16mm film was shot around the same period as the works published in the April issue of *Chūō Kōron*. However, to date, no subjects appearing in both the magazine photographs and the film have been identified, and the precise period of filming remains a matter for future investigation.

This film constitutes a rare moving-image work within Tomatsu's extensive career, one that can be situated among the recurring themes he explored throughout his life.[18] Sandra S. Phillips, Curator Emeritus of Photography at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, has noted that Shomei Tomatsu was "The first photographer to explore the experience of postwar Japan and its ambiguous relationship to the United States, Tomatsu would portray this subject more thoroughly and intensely than any other photographer. Only toward the end of his life was the issue of the Americanization of his country somewhat lessened in his work.[19]" Phillips further evaluates Tomatsu's *Occupation* series, stating:

> *Of all his subjects, it would be the one he persisted in most forcefully and inventively.*[20]

This work holds exceptional documentary value as the only film piece publicly released by Shomei Tomatsu. Its significance, however, extends beyond mere formal rarity; it is situated within the very subject to which Tomatsu devoted the most intense attention and passion during this period. As such, it serves as an extraordinarily rare and important cultural document, revealing his reflections and practices regarding Occupation-era Japan through the medium of film. Long considered lost, its recent rediscovery opens the possibility of identifying thematic and visual correspondences with photographs produced during the same period. This, in turn, provides a crucial opportunity to reassess Tomatsu's activities in 1960 within a more comprehensive framework.

Long believed to have been lost, its rediscovery opens up the possibility of identifying thematic and visual correspondences with his photographic works from the same period. This, in turn, provides an opportunity to recontextualize and more comprehensively understand Tomatsu's activities in 1960.

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Fig. 3:
Title page of Shomei Tomatsu, "IWAKUNI Iwakuni IWAKUNI: A Strange Reality Suddenly Given to Me, Which I Call Occupation — Iwakuni,Yamaguchi—" in *Chūō Kōron*, April issue (1960), Tokyo: Chuokoron-sha, Inc..

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650 EXPERIENCE and Tomatsu's 16mm Film

This 16mm positive film is believed to have been used for screening at the "Second 650 EXPERIENCE Gathering" held on October 2, 1960 (fig. 4).[21] The "650 EXPERIENCE Gathering" was organized by Tatsumi Hijikata (1928–1986), the founder of Butoh dance, who was widely recognized both in Japan and internationally. The gatherings were intended for avant-garde artists and included not only dancers but also filmmakers and composers.[22]

The precise circumstances of the meeting between Hijikata and photographer Shomei Tomatsu are not clear. However, Tomatsu himself stated that he was invited to participate by Hijikata.[23] The "650 EXPERIENCE Gathering" was held four times between 1959 and 1961, with the dates and titles as follows:

- *Six Avant-Garde Artists* – September 5, 1959 (Dai-ichi Seimei Hall, Hibiya)
- *Tatsumi Hijikata DANCE EXPERIENCE Gathering* – July 23–24, 1960 (Dai-ichi Seimei Hall, Hibiya)
- *Second Six Avant-Garde Artists* – October 2, 1960 (Dai-ichi Seimei Hall, Hibiya)
- *Tatsumi Hijikata DANCE EXPERIENCE Gathering* – September 3, 1961 (Dai-ichi Seimei Hall, Hibiya)

Tomatsu's participation occurred during the third screening, the *Second Six Avant-Garde Artists*. The pamphlet for this gathering lists dancers, photographers, musicians, and writers, illustrating the wide-ranging interdisciplinary connections among contemporary artists.



Fig. 4:
Cover page of The Second Six Avant-Garde Artists (pamphlet).

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Notably, Yukio Mishima wrote in the pamphlet that "in the latter half of the twentieth century, the era of cross-genre exchange and synthesis in the arts will revive",[24] while Shūzō Takiguchi praised the gathering as one that "is not confined to pre-existing artistic categories yet has the potential to grasp the most fundamental roots of art", and concluded, "I long to witness such a site of genesis rather than conventional avant-garde practices".[25] It is clear that the gathering brought together talent from across all contemporary artistic fields and was highly ambitious in scope.

In the same year, 1960, Tomatsu also photographed Neo-Dada artist Masunobu Yoshimura, through which he met architect Arata Isozaki.[26] Furthermore, in 1961, Tomatsu became involved with the Metabolism movement alongside architects Kisho Kurokawa, Masato Ōtaka, Fumihiko Maki, and designer Kiyoshi Awazu.



Fig. 5: The title "*Hikōki*" written by hand on the wheel.

Additionally, at the *Tatsumi Hijikata DANCE EXPERIENCE Gathering* held from July 23–24, 1960, Eikoh Hosoe, a founding member of VIVO, is listed among the participants. This suggests that Tomatsu may have joined the gathering through Hosoe's invitation. Although Tomatsu's own memory of the event appears somewhat unclear, he described the occasion in an interview as follows:[27]

> *It was probably through Eikoh Hosoe's introduction, but the 650 EXPERIENCE Gathering was held at Dai-ichi Seimei Hall, which had previously been a base for MacArthur and the GHQ. Hijikata asked me if I would like to present a work. I thought it wouldn't make sense to take photographs in a theater-like space, so I bought a 16mm camera and made a film. Among the presenters were Hijikata, Toshiro Mayuzumi,[28] and Shūji Terayama. At that time, I had been photographing military bases, so I filmed jet planes.*

Tomatsu's activities during this period were evidently diverse. The *650 EXPERIENCE Gathering* thus serves as a point of departure for exploring his collaborations with artists from other fields and the broader artistic practices of his contemporaries.

Furthermore, aspects of the production process for this work can

Tomoko Araki
Shomei Tomatsu's Hikōki (Airplane): Rediscovery and Archival of the 16mm Film
https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24558

be gleaned from Tomatsu's magazine contributions. He later recalled that making this film was "ultimately reckless," yet he also stated that he handled every stage of production by himself—from writing the scenario, preparing the equipment, negotiating with models, and scouting locations, to the actual filming.[29]

Regarding this, Tatsuo Fukushima also noted in a newspaper article that the artist executed all aspects of the work alone.[30] Fukushima went further, providing a detailed description of the film:

> *Without any explanation or story, it begins with a model airplane falling into a pond, then flying across the frame in intersecting paths, eventually crashing into glass and leaving cracks. Meanwhile, the images of children's expressions and festival scenes evoke a vivid impression unlike anything experienced in conventional cinema.*

Fukushima's description aligns with the contents recorded on the film, indicating that this positive print was likely not merely a reproduction but was actually screened.

Although somewhat difficult to read, the reel bears the inscription "Hikōki – Shomei Tomatsu" (fig. 5), which further suggests that this film was indeed intended for actual use. While this study does not, of course, undertake a comparative analysis of the work with other films, a subsequent interview with the artist confirms that he praised the Polish film *Ashes and Diamonds* and the French film *À bout de souffle*, while criticizing Japanese Nouvelle Vague films as commercial and dull. Tomatsu stated, "My work is not what you would call a cinematic film; it is something more accessible, more popular".[31]

In response, Tatsuo Fukushima, who conducted the interview, noted, "His 16mm film *Hikōki*, which he produced entirely on his own, was easy to understand, and the issues and characters it addressed were popular and relatable even to us". This suggests that, for contemporary audiences, the film was not experienced primarily as a poetic or avant-garde work but as something that could be readily comprehended. The film's composition—carefully constructed through location and model preparation as well as scenario planning—presented content that was naturally understandable and depicted familiar concerns for viewers of the time. This, in turn, vividly illustrates the extremely realistic stance Tomatsu himself later identified as central to his approach as a photographer.[32]

Hikōki: Synopsis and Preliminary Analysis

The central question here concerns the visual content of the film. Given the difficulty of fully transcribing the work into text, only a brief overview is provided. Although a digital version of the work already exists, a more refined and fully prepared edition will eventually be made publicly available, and readers are encouraged to consult it upon release. In the following, I limit myself to an objective account of the sequence of

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24558

images, depicted objects, and other details, many of which remain under investigation, and therefore describe only what can currently be established with certainty.

1. Overview of the Film

In a previous interview published in *Bijutsu Techo*, Fukushima describes the content of the film as follows:[33]

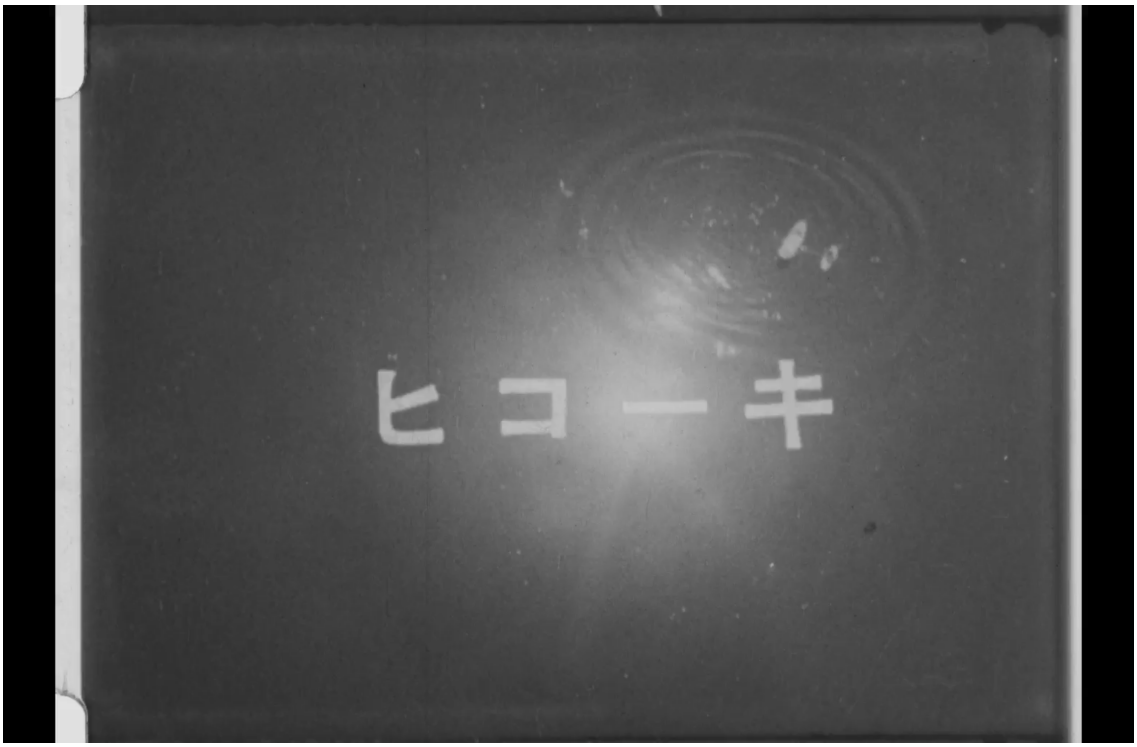
> *His 16mm film Hikōki, entirely produced by himself, was both accessible to us and engaged with subjects and characters that were popular among audiences. The film begins with a model airplane falling into and quietly sinking in the surface of a pond, and concludes with a real jet plane in flight, followed by a falling jet, the narrative ending in their interplay. Along the way, it depicts a festival near a military base, children, and other scenes in this roughly ten-minute short. This too, however, can be seen as part of his "occupation," a persistent exploration of remarkably popular themes.*

As Fukushima notes, the film may have appeared "accessible" and "popular" to contemporary audiences. However, for present-day viewers, some explanation of the depicted subjects and content is necessary. The author conducted a search of magazines and newspapers from 1960 and 1961, the period during which the film was produced, but detailed accounts of its content have not yet been located. Therefore, the following provides a descriptive account of the objects and events shown in the film.

The film opens with a countdown leader, and shimmering reflections appear on the surface of the water. From the left side of the frame, a toy airplane—possibly a rubber-powered model—glides into view and makes a gentle splash upon landing. The aircraft traces concentric ripples across the water, while the reflected light dances and flickers. At this moment, the title of the work, *Hikōki*, appears in katakana across the screen (fig. 6). The scene then cuts to a jet aircraft hurtling in from the left at high speed, which the camera tracks closely. As the jet disappears behind the shadow of a tree, the frame shifts again.

A young boy, who appears to be foreign, is shown laboriously inflating a balloon painted with the American flag (fig. 7). As he struggles to blow it up, he moves the balloon behind his head, and suddenly the entire screen is filled with the image of the flag. When he relaxes the finger he had pressed against the balloon's opening, it deflates instantly. In the next shot, a jet emerges from a gap in the foliage and streaks across the frame from left to right. Responding to the passage of this aircraft, the camera shifts to the right, revealing another boy. This boy, scratching his back with his right hand, gazes upward as one jet, then another, flies past. From his facial features, he appears to be Japanese (fig. 8) and slightly older than the first boy introduced.

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24558



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7

The camera follows the jets as they pass, circling dynamically through the frame. Although the film is silent, the planes' movements convey a sense of thunderous noise, trailing dark smoke as they speed by. The scene then cuts to the two boys together, smiling shyly at the camera. At this point, the viewer is made aware that the short film is, in a sense, their story.

Abruptly, the frame shifts to a man wearing a *Hyottoko* mask, followed by alternating shots of the dancing masked man and the laughing boys. A jet again pierces the foliage at extraordinary speed. One air-

Fig. 6: Opening title screen of the film.

Fig. 7: A scene of the film.

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24558



8



9

Fig. 8: A scene of the film.

Fig. 9: A scene of the film.

craft passes, then a second, and the masked man appears from the left, dancing across the screen. Seemingly beckoned by this figure, a group of boys carrying a *mikoshi*—a portable shrine—emerges from the rear and moves to the right of the frame. The two main boys run to follow them. A bright-haired girl watches the procession, while foreign cars speed past in the background. Two *mikoshi* pass, and a large fan inscribed with "Nishitsuruma Chōnai Anzen" (a prayer for the safety of the Nishitsuruma neighborhood) appears prominently (fig. 9).

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24558

The two boys, having accompanied the *mikoshi* group, pass behind an elderly woman holding a parasol at a street corner, separating from the procession as they proceed down a different street.

The boys are shown holding hands and running joyfully through the trees. As they progress through the forest, a large spider web fills the frame, seemingly foreshadowing the events to come. Upon exiting the woods, a sign reading "Western Rodeo at Boys Town" appears, along with the inscriptions "MINAMI-RINKAN YAMATO-SHI KANAGAWA-KEN JAPAN." As the sign rotates, the scene shifts to reveal the boys observing a stable through a chain-link fence (fig. 10), where white men and women tend to horses. Wearing western hats and boots, these figures handle the horses with a cowboy-like precision. After watching them for some time, the two boys leap and run away, leaving the scene in high spirits.

The next sequence depicts six Black boys marching in a line from right to left, arranged in order of height. A small white boy discovers a rope and places it around the neck of the older Japanese boy. The two then engage in a playful "horse game," lifting, spinning, and dragging each other across the grass. During this interlude, the six boys previously introduced suddenly appear from the undergrowth (fig. 11). As the camera closes in on their faces, the younger white boy disappears from the frame. Left alone and holding the rope, the Japanese boy abruptly turns on his heel and exits the scene.

Once again, a jet plane streaks across the sky. Within a tunnel-like grove, the Japanese boy proceeds as if pursued by the six boys. When he glances back, they stand resolutely, as if guarding the boundary of their territory. Defeated, he lowers his shoulders and departs in apparent dejection. Exiting the tunnel, he removes the rope from around his neck, while the six boys remain visible on the far side. The sequence then cuts to a close-up of the Japanese boy shedding tears.

At seven minutes and five seconds, the film returns to the jets. Formations of four, three, and two planes fly by, some moving at unusually slow speeds seemingly—a phenomenon currently under technical investigation. Multiple jets of varying sizes and forms occupy the frame. Interspersed with these aerial sequences are close-ups of the crying boy and shots of shattered mirrors. This alternating montage continues until nine minutes and seven seconds, when a mirror laid on the grass finally breaks. Subsequently, the katakana characters *Owari* (The End) appear over the broken glass. The film concludes with a blackout.

2. Preliminary Content Analysis

The foregoing provides an overview of the film in question. The following section presents a preliminary analysis and observations based on the author's current examination.

As noted above, this film had long been considered lost. Moreover, it had proven difficult to ascertain its content in detail from contemporary critical descriptions, and information regarding the filming location remained unclear. Traditionally, this film has been associated with a known work purportedly shot by Tomatsu at the Iwakuni base

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24558



10



11

Fig. 10-11: A scene of the film.

(fig. 3), and it had generally been assumed that the footage was filmed in Iwakuni.

However, through the process of digitizing and closely examining the film, the author has identified evidence suggesting a different location. Specifically, the characters on the fans carried by a group bearing a portable shrine, as well as signage posted in a U.S. military residential

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24558

area displaying the names "Nishitsuruma" and "Yamato," indicate that the film was shot in Nishitsuruma, Yamato City, Kanagawa Prefecture. Furthermore, as noted above, the address visible on a sign at a U.S. military facility, reached via a path through a grove of mixed woodland, corroborates that the filming took place in the Chūō-Rinkan area, which includes Nishitsuruma adjacent to Tsuruma.

Yamato City, including the Tsuruma area, has maintained close historical ties with military and defense facilities since the prewar period.[34] In the late 1930s, the Ayase region saw the establishment of a Japanese Navy airbase. In particular, beginning in 1939, preparations were undertaken for the Atsugi Naval Airfield, which would later become Atsugi Air Base, spanning what is now Yamato City and Ayase City. Following Japan's surrender in 1945, the Atsugi Airfield was seized by Allied forces (United States) in September of that year. Although initially left unused, the base was redeveloped as a U.S. Navy air station during and after the Korean War (1950–1953), functioning as a strategically significant facility in the Far East. From 1971 onward, the base has been jointly operated with the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force, a partnership that continues to the present day.

The area has also experienced the hazards of military activity. On September 8, 1964, a U.S. military aircraft crash caused substantial destruction to residential and industrial buildings within Yamato City, resulting in casualties among local residents. Tomatsu's filming occurred during a period when the base was actively used by the U.S. Navy in the post–Korean War years. In September 1960, local neighborhood associations established the "Atsugi Air Base Noise Prevention Promotion Alliance",[35] reflecting the community's growing concerns regarding noise and other impacts from the adjacent U.S. military residential areas. The surrounding region thus encompassed both the military installation and the housing of military families, giving rise to a complex set of social and environmental challenges.

Given this context, it is unsurprising that Tomatsu, whose work in the 1960s often focused on issues of "occupation" and involved filming across multiple bases throughout Japan, selected this particular locale as a filming site. Notably, the film features striking depictions of verdant groves through which boys walk. While pockets of natural environment, such as Izumi-no-Mori and Chūō-Rinkan Nature Forest, persist in contemporary Yamato City, urban development has largely fragmented these areas. The groves depicted in the film, by contrast, suggest a more extensive and continuous natural landscape, offering a rare visual record of pre-urbanized scenery. As such, the footage holds cultural and historical value as a document that allows for the study of Yamato City's urban and natural environment during this period.

Research on the neighborhoods where the *mikoshi* festival took place, as well as the boys depicted in the footage, is currently underway with the cooperation of the Yamato City Neighborhood Association Council.

In the film, there is a scene in which

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24558

two boys watch American adults tending to horses through a chain-link fence. The fence in the foreground functions not merely as a physical barrier but as a highly suggestive symbolic element. Historically, chain-link fences were installed to separate Japanese residential areas from U.S. military facilities and housing, thereby visually materializing the occupation and the subsequent base system.

This motif of fences recurs throughout Tomatsu's photographic oeuvre. In his work, fences are never merely components of the landscape; they operate as visual devices that simultaneously signify spatial division and embody the asymmetries of power and culture. Tomatsu underscores this symbolic dimension in *Camp Okinawa*, where he observes:[36]

> *A characteristic feature of postwar Japan, I have said, is Americanization. From the barbed wire and chain-link fences surrounding U.S. military bases, America gradually and imperceptibly seeped out, spreading across the country.*

The adverbs "gradually and imperceptibly" here convey the subtle, almost insidious manner in which American presence penetrated everyday life, reflecting Tomatsu's direct experience of witnessing the foreign culture and authority imposed upon the local landscape. This is not an abstract historical observation but a statement grounded in lived experience.

In this sense, the film's depiction of the boys' gaze through the fence functions similarly to Tomatsu's photographs: it structures a visual dichotomy between observer and observed, inside and outside, dominant and dominated. The recurrent presentation of the fence in the film thus symbolically represents the pervasive yet often invisible presence of the United States in postwar Japan, which, although ostensibly confined within the fence, permeated daily life.

It should be noted from the outset that the interpretations presented below are speculative and reflect the author's own conjectures. Tomatsu's direct experience of war corresponds to his childhood between the ages of nine and fifteen. From the perspective of developmental psychology, this period spans late childhood to early adolescence, a critical stage during which an individual's values and sensitivities are formed.

Regarding the Japanese boy depicted as the protagonist of the narrative, his exact age is not specified; however, it is reasonable to assume that he has not yet reached fifteen. Nevertheless, this age range largely overlaps with the late childhood that Tomatsu himself experienced under wartime conditions. From this standpoint, it is conceivable that Tomatsu projected his own memories, emotional states, and the inner conflicts arising from wartime experiences onto the figure of an anonymously depicted boy. This interpretation is supported by Tomatsu's own statements. In *Showa Shasin Zen-Shigoto,* he reflects:[37]

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24558

> *After the defeat, darkness and light beame clearly visible, and values shifted 180 degrees. Our distrust of adults grew by the day. The new era began this process unfolded. My most impressionable years were spent during those times, and that intense experience became a filter through which I've seen things ever since....*

Through the "filter" imposed on his childhood memories, Tomatsu may have mediated his own experiences and emotions via the boy protagonist, thereby embedding these reflections within the work itself.

As noted above, the content of this audiovisual work is currently under detailed examination, with the cooperation of the Nishitsuruma Neighborhood Association, to verify historical accuracy and regional context. Additionally, future research will investigate the U.S. military bases that existed in the area at the time. Following a thorough verification of the objects and landscapes depicted in the footage against historical sources, consideration will be given to its public release.

This film can be situated as a record capturing the moment when "Americanization" permeated the everyday lives of those in the Tsuruma district who shared their living spaces with the U.S. military, entering their world through the mesh of a "chain-link fence." As Fukushima has noted, at the time these phenomena were readily comprehensible to the people and accepted as "popular" realities, both in terms of the issues addressed and the characters depicted.

However, in the present day, more than eighty years after the end of the war, much of the contextual knowledge and experiential understanding that once informed interpretations of these circumstances have been lost. For this reason, it is essential not to treat the events depicted in the film as self-evident. Rather, a careful, element-by-element examination is required to reconsider the intentions underpinning Tomatsu's construction of the work. On this basis, the present study aims primarily to clarify the historical value and expressive characteristics of the film.

The film can also be understood as a valuable visual document that records the quotidian dimensions of life at a specific historical moment—1960—through a narrative structure that communicates these experiences to contemporary audiences. Scenes of traditional Japanese ritual centered around portable shrines (*mikoshi*) reflect everyday life and communal customs of the period. At the same time, the work is characterized by the intermittent intrusion of contemporaneous yet incongruous elements.

For example, sequences are inserted in which foreign automobiles, normally absent from the streets, pass between the visually contrasting presences of Japanese children in ritual processions and a blonde foreign girl (fig. 12). This imagery symbolically illustrates the coexistence, without clear order or integration, of traditional life and foreign cultural elements that persisted in post-occupation Japan's urban spaces. Similarly, visual motifs such as

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24558



12

jet planes traversing the sky in multiple directions or the sudden appearance of a cowboy in a wooded area disrupt temporal and spatial continuity, producing an impression that diverges from everyday realism.

The concatenation of these fragmentary and discontinuous images can be read as reflecting the social and psychological conditions of the people at the time. The reality depicted is not one that can be fully explained through orderly historical narrative; rather, it is an extremely "disjointed" and contextually fragmented world, where multiple cultural codes and power structures intersect abruptly. In this regard, the film can be evaluated as a visual and narrative embodiment of what Tomatsu Shomei himself described as the "Strange Reality Suddenly Given" of postwar Japan.

Fig. 12: A scene of the film.

This work of Shomei Tomatsu can be evaluated as an effort to depict specific historical circumstances through a narrative form while simultaneously capturing objective facts for transmission to later generations. The adoption of a narrative structure offers a distinct advantage unique to the medium of film, allowing for the expression of temporal continuity and psychological transitions that cannot be fully realized in still photography.

Although direct comparison with his photographic oeuvre is constrained by the lack of extant moving-image works, it is noteworthy that Tomatsu actively constructs a narrative plot in this film that is absent from his photographs. Specifically, the disjointed worldview experienced by a Japanese boy and the attendant formation of his mental landscapes are repeatedly punctuated by imagery of jet planes. This structural device functions to intersect personal experience with images emblematic of the "Occupation."

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24558

From this perspective, a detailed analysis of the narrative structure and cinematic techniques in this work offers a productive lens through which to reconsider the visual and conceptual characteristics inherent in Tomatsu's photographic practice, particularly within his *Occupation* series.

Archival Digitization

1. Digitization for Preservation Purposes

Shomei Tomatsu's wife, Yasuko, has long supported her husband's activities while also working as a printer for his photographic projects. Currently, Yasuko manages Tomatsu's personal office, the *Office of Shomei Tomatsu, INTERFACE,*[38] where she continues creative work and is also involved in planning and organizing exhibitions and publications. The office's activities include archival management of Tomatsu's works. The archive contains not only the artist's works but also the equipment he used during his lifetime, photobooks and magazines in which his works were published, and other paper-based materials such as contributed essays.

Because Tomatsu frequently relocated his photographic work sites, he moved multiple times, leaving many materials in a largely unorganized state. During the process of organizing the archive, this work (*Hikōki*) was rediscovered. Its discovery is particularly significant, as the work's whereabouts had been unknown for a long period.

Upon opening the protective case, a strong vinegar-like odor was detected from the film. The film was wound on a reel measuring 7.5 cm in diameter (fig. 5) and stored in a square protective case with 21-cm sides (fig. 13). The protective case bears Tomatsu's own handwriting: "Hikōki Shomei Tomatsu". On April 27, 2022, digitization of the film was conducted at YOKOCINE D.I.A. INC.,[39] a private company in the motion picture industry. The total runtime of the footage is 9 minutes and 29 seconds, and it uses the standard cinematic frame rate of 24 frames per second. As will be described later, the digitization process was carried out carefully, and expert inspection confirmed that the film's condition was good.

First, a film inspection was conducted to assess the condition of the material. During this process, the edges of the film, which had become brittle due to aging, were repaired using specialized film repair tape. Foreign matter and dust adhering to the film surface were carefully removed, and any residual adhesive from prior editing—potentially a source of future film damage—was meticulously eliminated (fig. 14). These procedures were carried out by experienced technicians, who examined each frame sequentially, performing condition assessments and necessary repairs as required.

Next, the film underwent a cleaning process. This stage involved ultrasonic cleaning and reconditioning through water washing. Prior to this, the responsible technicians had thoroughly examined the material properties and the degree of deterioration, enabling the selection and application of the optimal treatment method tailored to the condition of the film.

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24558



13

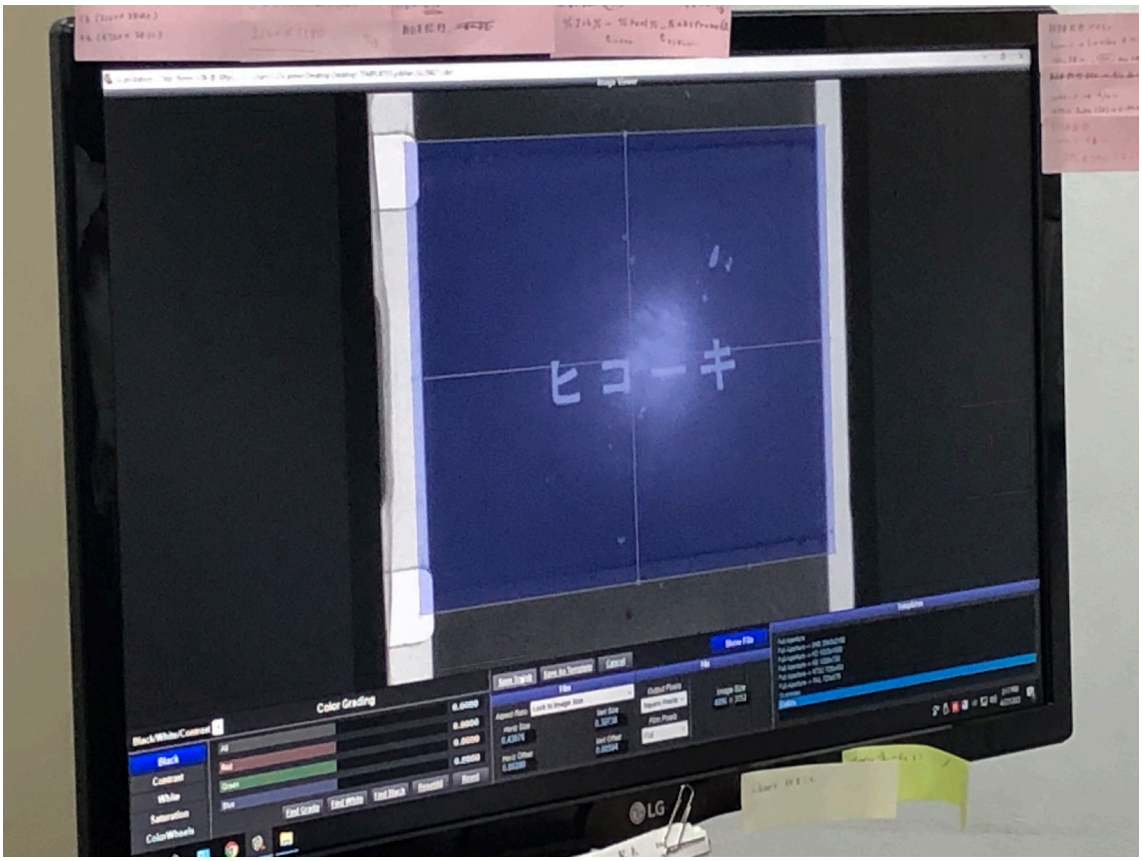


14

Fig. 13: The case in which the film was stored.

Fig. 14: Conducting slight restoration of the film.

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24558



15

Finally, the film was digitized through a scanning process (fig. 15). Typically, positive films are considered duplicate materials, and high-resolution cleaning or 4K preservation may be excessive. However, in this case, the original negative had already been missing, and thus the positive print was treated as equivalent to the original. Upon recommendation of the technicians, the digitization employed the ProRes 4444 format, which allows low-compression, high-quality preservation. ProRes is a widely used versatile compression format, and the 4444 variant, in particular, offers minimal quality loss, making it suitable for archival purposes.

Additionally, scanning in the standard 4K television aspect ratio (16:9) would have introduced black bars (Pillarboxing) on the sides,[40] reducing data efficiency. Therefore, the film was scanned at a 4:3 full 4K size to preserve the original aspect ratio, resulting in high-resolution digital data faithful to the source.

Although a vinegar-like odor was detected upon discovery, detailed condition assessments by the technicians confirmed that the film was generally in good condition, allowing the procedures to proceed without impediment. During the inspection, observations of the perforation shapes and conditions revealed that multiple film segments had been spliced together.

Through these sequential processes, the valuable film footage was successfully digitized and preserved. For reference purposes, a lightweight MP4 file was also produced, ensuring accessibility while maintaining the integrity of the archival material.

Fig. 15:
Digitization.

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2. Future Prospects of the Archive

Rare film works such as the one under consideration are ideally preserved over extended periods. In this context, it is necessary to conserve not only the negative and positive film materials themselves, but also the containers in which they are stored, as well as the various physical media produced at the time of public exhibition, including flyers, posters, and brochures. As many specialists have noted, Japan's high-temperature, high-humidity environment presents particularly severe conditions for film preservation, resulting in the ongoing deterioration and loss of cultural resources that should be imparted to future generations. Furthermore, decisions must be made regarding which physical materials to retain and to what extent, given the constraints of limited storage space.

From the perspective of film storage, Japan has historically maintained specialized national institutions for film preservation. The Film Center, established under the auspices of the Tokyo National Museum of Modern Art, served as a key repository.[41] In 2018, this institution evolved into the National Film Archive of Japan, the sixth museum within the framework of the Independent Administrative Institution, National Museum of Art.[42] The National Film Archive systematically collects surviving films from both Japan and abroad, with priority given to films at risk of deterioration or disposal, films of high rarity, and those required for screenings or international exchange. The Archive also engages in comprehensive collection of related materials, including books, posters, and still photographs.

Meanwhile, in the offices of many photographers, both individual and corporate, dedicated rooms with controlled, low, and stable temperature and humidity are maintained for the preservation of films and prints.[43] As Kae Ishihara has pointed out, specialized storage environments for film are rare outside of public film archives or commercial storage services.[44] Nevertheless, photographers and archival offices responsible for their works largely achieve preservation through independent efforts. From the standpoint of safeguarding Japan's valuable cultural heritage, however, it is also necessary to consider, for the future, comprehensive public repositories capable of long-term preservation that can encompass all relevant materials. In such cases, careful consideration must be given to the rights of the photographer and copyright holders, particularly because many offices continue to actively promote exhibitions and publications both domestically and internationally, regardless of whether the artist is living or deceased.

All archival materials of Shomei Tomatsu, including the work in question, are currently managed by his private office. Yasuko Tomatsu now directs the office and oversees the archiving of his work alongside posthumous exhibitions and publications. The author is involved in the operation of the office and the management of its archival activities. The rediscovery of the work, long believed lost, was a significant and welcome event, and its digitization prior to the onset of film degradation was particularly fortunate. Moving forward, this work represents an invaluable resource for the study of Japanese photographic

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24558

history. While detailed analysis of its content falls outside the scope of the present paper, such research is planned.

Looking ahead, there are plans not only to preserve this material but also to make it publicly accessible, akin to Tomatsu's other photographic works. This may involve converting digitized materials into a Digital Cinema Package (DCP) and conducting digital remastering. However, these processes are closely intertwined with preservation and restoration strategies, including questions regarding the extent to which the original should be maintained and the degree of restoration to be undertaken—issues central to contemporary conservation practice—and therefore require careful evaluation and scholarly discussion.

All images without specific credit belong to the following rights holder:

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Endnotes:

1 * The author wishes to express deep appreciation to Mrs. Yasuko Tomatsu, wife of Shomei Tomatsu, whose enduring support has been essential to his creative practice. As the current director of the Office of Shomei Tomatsu, INTERFACE, she continues to make significant contributions through her engagement in production, the mentoring of younger generations, and archival work. Her generous cooperation in the preparation of this study is gratefully acknowledged.

The author also extends sincere appreciation to Mr. Minoru Tano (Group Gendai Films), Mr. Takashi Fujimoto, and Mr. Yokoo (YOKOCINE D.I.A.) for their valuable advice and kind assistance during the archival process.

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Iwanami Shashin Bunko 1954.

2 *Iwanami Shashin Bunko* 1955.

3 The ten participating artists were as follows: Yasuhiro Ishimoto, Kikuji Kawada, Shun Kawahara, Akira Sato, Akira Tanno, Shomei Tomatsu, Toyoko Tokiwa, Masaya Nakamura, Ikko Narahara, and Eikoh Hosoe.

4 The photographic collective *VIVO* was founded in July 1959 by six of the above members, including Shomei Tomatsu, and remained active until June 1961. At the time, the *Realism Photography Movement*, led by Ken Domon, held significant influence in Japan. In response, *VIVO* sought to explore new directions for contemporary Japanese photography. The group emphasized “private” or “subjective” photographic expression and, following the example of Magnum Photos, aimed to establish a system in which photographers could autonomously manage the use and distribution of their own works.

5 Tomatsu 1967.

6 Regarding this project, Tomatsu stated that it was brought to *VIVO* by the photography critic Tomomi Ito (1927–1986), who designated him as the photographer. He also recalled that during the location scouting in Nagasaki, he was accompanied by Ito, the photography critic Koan Shigemori (1926–1992), and a staff member of the Japan Council against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs. This account is recorded in the following interview conducted by Yasufumi Nakamori at the artist’s office in Naha, Okinawa, on August 7, 2011: Oral History Interview with Shomei Tomatsu, conducted by Yasufumi Nakamori and Ikegami Hiroko, August 7, 2011, Oral History Archives of Japanese Art, https://oralarthistory.org/archives/interviews/tomatsu_shomei_02/.

7 Japan Council Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs 1961.

8 Many of the works photographed and documented by Tomatsu in Nagasaki at that time were later included in the following photobook published in 1966: Tomatsu 1966.

9 Tomatsu 1969.

10 For Tomatsu and the “Americanization” brought about by the “Occupation,” see the Yoshinari, Miyoshi 2022.

11 Taira 2013, pp. 12–17; based on the keynote report: Shomei Tomatsu, *Report: Symposium Commemorating the Exhibition Shomei Tomatsu: Okinawa Mandala—The Memory of Photography, The Creation of Photography: Shomei Tomatsu and Okinawa* (July 6, 2002).

12 Tomatsu 1986.

13 Tomatsu 1986.

14 Tomatsu 1960a.

15 Tomatsu 1960b.

16 Tomatsu 1960c.

17 Tomatsu 1960d. Although the reason why only the Iwakuni installment was

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published in a different magazine remains unclear, the first three installments that appeared in *Asahi Camera* each bear the heading "U.S. BASES IN JAPAN SERIES" on the cover page, numbered (1) through (3). Moreover, the subtitle-like phrase "A Strange Reality Suddenly Given to Me, Which I Call 'Occupation" is shared across all four installments.

18 As a moving-image work that was made publicly available, even if only temporarily, this film was likely the first and last of its kind by Tomatsu. However, it is evident from his later conversations—such as his dialogue with poet Shuntarō Tanikawa—that he was by no means dismissive of filmmaking. In that exchange, Tomatsu expressed his desire to create a film about Nagasaki: Tanigawa, Tomatsu, 1962, p. 152.

19 See: https://www.sfmoma.org/artist/Shomei_Tomatsu/.

20 https://www.sfmoma.org/artist/Shomei_Tomatsu/.

21 Among the physical materials once owned by Shomei Tomatsu, only the pamphlet reproduced in this paper has been confirmed. Meanwhile, on the website of the "Hijikata Tatsumi Archive" operated by the Keio University Art Center, images of a poster designed by Mitsuo Kano and of tickets that were sold at the time for 300 yen can be found. http://www.art-c.keio.ac.jp/old-website/archive/hijikata/portas/performance/RCA_TH_EP3.html.

22 In the pamphlet for the second performance in which Tomatsu participated, the names of a diverse range of artists—including Tatsumi Hijikata, Toshiro Mayuzumi, Yukio Mishima, Shuji Terayama, and Shuzo Takiguchi—are listed. The pamphlet also features a double-page spread of photographs by Tomatsu himself.

23 See the aforementioned Oral History Interview with Shomei Tomatsu, conducted by Yasufumi Nakamori and Ikegami Hiroko, https://oralarthistory.org/archives/interviews/tomatsu_shomei_02/.

24 Mishima 1960.

25 Takiguchi 1960. This page also features contributions by Yukio Mishima and Tatsuhiko Shibusawa.

26 See the aforementioned Oral History Interview with Shomei Tomatsu, conducted by Yasufumi Nakamori and Ikegami Hiroko, https://oralarthistory.org/archives/interviews/tomatsu_shomei_02/.

27 This interview was conducted in conjunction with the exhibition *Letters from the Sun* (September 23–November 20, 2011) held at the Okinawa Prefectural Museum of Art on October 30, 2011. As Tomatsu was suddenly taken ill and unable to attend the symposium with Gozo Yoshimasu originally scheduled during the exhibition period, the interview was carried out at a later date. It is published in Tomatsu, Yoshimasu 2013.

28 Toshiro Mayuzumi (1929–1997) was a prominent figure in postwar Japanese classical and contemporary music and served as a lecturer in the Composition Department at the Tokyo University of the Arts.

29 Tomatsu 1960e.

30 Fukushima 1960.

31 Fukushima 1961.

32 Tomatsu 1983, pp. 98–99. This two-page spread by Shomei Tomatsu clearly demonstrates his stance as a photographer who is deeply attentive to the present moment. In it, he emphasizes that "photography is always the now; the camera captures only the present", and further explains that "what the camera records is the object as it exists in the present, even if a thousand years pass. Therefore, photography is always the now".

33 Fukushima 1961, p. 47.

34 The cultural promotion department, Yamato-City (ed.), *History of Yamato-City*, 2020, Yamato-City, pp. 450-474.

35 https://www.atsugibakudou.com.

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24558

36 Tomatsu 2010, cover page.

37 Tomatsu 1984. Although it originally appeared in the work cited on the left, the author here quotes it from the following book containing Rubinfine's translation: Tomatsu, Rubinfien, Junkerman 2014, p. 19.

38 Regarding the activities of Yasuko Tomatsu, see the interview conducted at her gallery in Okinawa in February 2025□https://imaonline.jp/articles/interview/tomatsu_yasuko/#page-3.

39 YOKOCINE D.I.A. INC.: https://www.yokocine.com/index.html.

40 For reference on the term "Pillarboxing", see: https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100327379.

41 See the following web site for reference of the Film Center: https://www.nfaj.go.jp/FC/fc.html.

42 See he following web site for reference of National Film Archive of Japan: https://www.nfaj.go.jp/english/.

43 Research on photographic preservation has been compiled by scholars and photographers, including Eikoh Hosoe, and was referenced by the author in the present study: Gazō Hozon Kenkyūkai (Image Preservation Study Group), Society of Photography and Imaging of Japan 1996 (Japanese text only). It should be noted that the same society has continued to hold seminars on image preservation up to the present day.

44 Ishihara 2018. See especially pp. 12-38 for a comprehensive overview of previous film archival activities in Japan.

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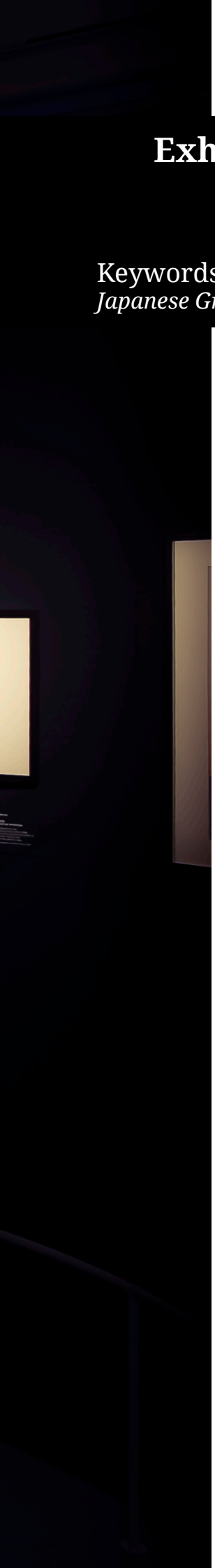
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Exhibiting Japan: Displays and Narratives of Japanese Graphic Design in Paris and Bologna

Federico Maria Giorgi, Alessandro Paolo Lena

Keywords:
Japanese Graphics; Museography; Exhibition Design; Storytelling; Fashion



ABSTRACT:

In Europe, between 2025 and 2026, the exhibitions *Manga. Tout un art! De la tradition japonaise à la pop culture* at the Musée Guimet in Paris and *Graphic Japan: From Hokusai to Manga* at the Museo Civico Archeologico in Bologna celebrated Japanese culture through the valorization of its long and prestigious graphic tradition, retracing the impact and influences that nearly three hundred years of history have had on numerous contemporary artistic productions that have enjoyed extraordinary international success. Through the analysis and comparison of the museographic and museological aspects of these two exhibitions, this article aims to examine the contemporary relevance of their curatorial features, narrative choices, and the exhibition challenges these display projects are called upon to address. In particular, it seeks to highlight how the intersection of different perspectives, media, techniques, and materials now lies at the core of an exhibition storytelling approach that strives to clearly weave a dense and complex network of connections between art and fashion, myth and history, economy and culture, and East and West.

In Europa, a cavallo tra il 2025 e il 2026, le mostre *Manga. Tout un art! De la tradition japonaise à la pop culture* al Museo Guimet di Parigi e di *Graphic Japan da Hokusai al manga* al Museo Civico Archeologico di Bologna, hanno celebrato la cultura giapponese attraverso la valorizzazione della sua lunga e prestigiosa tradizione grafica, ritracciando l'impatto e le influenze che quasi trecento anni di storia hanno avuto su numerose produzioni artistiche contemporanee dal grandissimo successo internazionale. Attraverso l'analisi e il confronto degli aspetti museografici e museologici di queste due mostre, questo contributo vuole quindi osservare l'attualità delle caratteristiche curatoriali, delle scelte narrative e delle sfide espositive che questi progetti di allestimento sono portati ad affrontare. In particolare, si vuole sottolineare come l'incrocio tra sguardi, supporto, tecniche e materiali differenti sia oramai al centro di uno storytelling espositivo che cerca di tessere in modo chiaro una fitta e complessa rete di collegamenti tra arte e moda, tra mito e storia, tra economia e cultura, tra oriente e occidente.

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Opening Picture:

Dior dress inspired by Hokusai's *The Great Wave off Kanagawa,* exhibited at the Musée Guimet in Paris. Photo of the authors.

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Two major exhibitions have recently and simultaneously celebrated Japanese culture in Europe, and above all its long and prestigious graphic tradition. These are *Manga. Tout un art! De la tradition japonaise à la pop culture* at the Musée Guimet in Paris[1] and *Graphic Japan: From Hokusai to Manga* at the Museo Civico Archeologico in Bologna.[2]

Both exhibition projects are part of a broader and long-standing museological interest in Japan in the West,[3] one that continues to be explored not only as an object of art-historical study but as a complex cultural system capable of intertwining tradition and contemporaneity, canonized languages and productions of popular and mass culture.

This article therefore aims to examine, through the similarities and differences between these two case studies, the relationship between certain curatorial features and the ways in which narrative choices and the exhibition-related challenges of the materials were translated into the architectural design of exhibition routes and displays. The focus is on the storytelling strategies adopted, highlighting how exhibition design actively participates in the construction of the narrative and in the mediation of content. Within this perspective, fashion in particular is taken up as an interpretive prism through which to observe the different ways in which the two exhibitions articulate the dialogue between Japanese graphic tradition and contemporary visual culture,[4] acting as a shared language capable of engaging diverse audiences with differing levels of expertise, expectations, and familiarity with Japanese visual culture.

Architectural Design Between Narrative Models and Museographic Solutions[5]

In the critical comparison between these two museographic experiences, a first aspect that is important to underscore is that, in both cases, the realization of the exhibition design project was entrusted to well-known local studios that had already, in one way or another, had the opportunity to work on related themes and within spaces similar to those of these two recent exhibitions. This prior experience and accumulated knowledge had a strong impact on the remarkable effectiveness with which the complex spaces of the Musée Guimet and the Museo Civico Archeologico of Bologna were utilized.

The exhibition design for the Paris show was developed by Naori Tamazoe and the AtoY studio. After graduating in Tokyo, Naori Tamazoe began her career at prestigious architecture firms such as Jean Nouvel and Lacaton & Vassal, and collaborated on numerous museum-related projects, including the construction of the Louvre-Lens with SANAA. In 2014 she founded AtoY, and since then her agency has specialized in the creation of exhibition scenography, often directly connected to both traditional and contemporary Japanese culture.[6] Among these projects is *Japonorama. Nouveau regard sur la création contemporaine* at the Centre Pompidou-Metz,[7] whose exhibition design[8] traced the evolution of contemporary Japanese art from the 1970s onward through works of art, design, architecture, and fashion. On that occasion, the architect emphasized the need to establish coherence

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between the artists' work and the forms of the museum display:

> *Les espaces, tantôt anguleux, tantôt courbes, s'adaptent aux différentes sections, en cohérence avec le travail des artistes. Les sections sont différenciées à l'aide de rideaux translucides qui permettent de deviner la suite de l'exposition.*[9]

Already in this instance, graphic artworks were juxtaposed with haute couture garments, a *fil rouge* that, as will be discussed, recurs frequently in numerous exhibition designs devoted to Japan. With regard to this specific aspect, one may also recall *Un bestiaire japonais* at the Maison de la culture du Japon in Paris,[10] a fully immersive experience centered on the Edo period and the everyday life of its artistic expressions. Another recurring theme in exhibitions produced by the AtoY studio is the fundamental relationship between Japanese aesthetics and the West, which emerged most clearly in the exhibition *Japon – japonisme. Objets inspirés 1867–2018* at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. [11]Here, the aim of the exhibition design was to highlight the extraordinary richness of the museum's Japanese art collections while simultaneously demonstrating the continuity of Japanese influence on Western artistic creation through art objects, design pieces, textile works, and graphic arts.

To better understand the exhibition choices made in the Paris show, it is important to recall that the National Museum of Asian Arts is itself relatively small, and that temporary exhibitions are now almost always entirely located on the underground level.[12] The exhibition space is particularly low, and in the case of many exhibitions it becomes necessary to create a large number of transverse panels which, while allowing the galleries to accommodate more works, often make the visitor's route appear tortuous. The reduced height of the spaces also generates significant additional challenges: not only in terms of a potential sense of overcrowding, but especially with regard to lighting,[13] which in these conditions becomes more difficult to manage. Closely connected to the spaces of the Musée Guimet – practically the same ones now occupied by *Manga. Tout un art!* – was the exhibition *L'arc et le sabre. Imaginaire guerrier du Japon*,[14] devoted to the different perceptions – between myth and history – of samurai warriors, and in particular to the evocation of the famous events of the forty-seven ronin. Already in that case, the relationship between the country's historical and mythological culture and its more recent popular production was central to certain displays in which toy figurines of Darth Vader and the Power Rangers were exhibited,[15] both of whose armors were partly inspired by those of the samurai. These are precisely the recurring elements in AtoY's exhibition designs that reappear in the conception of *Manga. Tout un art!*: the close relationship between history and pop culture, the juxtaposition of art and fashion, and the formal coherence between the works on display and the design of the exhibition layout.

The design of the Italian exhibition, instead, was overseen by the architect and well-known designer Paolo Capponcelli[16] together with his son,

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the architect Filippo Capponcelli, of Panstudio Architetti Associati. Founded in the early 1980s, the studio has focused primarily on museographic design for both public and private clients involved in cultural promotion, including public administrations, universities, religious institutions, foundations, and companies specializing in the production of exhibition events. In the Bologna area in particular, Panstudio has realized the Museo Civico Medievale, the expansion of the Pinacoteca Nazionale, the Museo e la Biblioteca Internazionale della Musica,[17] the Urban Park of Piazza Maggiore, and the renovation of the former Sala Borsa. In addition, the studio has also curated other exhibitions devoted to Japan, such as *Giappone. Storie d'amore e guerra* at Palazzo Albergati,[18] where more than 200 works paid homage to masters of *ukiyo-e* such as Hiroshige, Utamaro, Hokusai, and Kuniyoshi. In that case, drawing primarily on the visual suggestions of polychrome woodblock prints, the narrative of the emergence of *ukiyo-e* and the famous *shunga* prints, the visitor's itinerary unfolded between the female universe of geisha and *ōiran* and the fascination of samurai warriors.[19] In the same spaces that now host *Graphic Japan*, the exhibition *Hokusai Hiroshige. Oltre l'onda. Capolavori dal Museum of Fine Arts di Boston* was held in 2018 at the Museo Civico Archeologico, likewise organized by MondoMostre and Skira.[20] The Museo Civico Archeologico of Bologna is characterized by spaces that are significantly higher than those of the Musée Guimet – indeed, they are extremely tall spaces that present a distinct set of challenges during the exhibition design phase.[21]

A first issue concerns the museum's perimeter walls, which resemble a veritable "Gruyère cheese," in that the free surfaces available for displaying works are in fact far fewer than those that appear visually accessible. Fan coil units, access points to inspection shafts, security systems, fire prevention equipment, and emergency exits create a series of "voids" in front of which it is not possible to hang artworks, place display cases, or construct new partition walls. Another architectural issue requiring resolution stems from the fact that both visitor entry and exit occur at the same point, making it necessary to create an invisible "traffic divider" that also incorporates the exhibition bookshop area. In this case, the problem was addressed through the construction of a long, iconic entrance wall that, on one side, welcomes visitors with a display of selected introductory materials and works, and, on the other side, creates a narrow exit corridor (Fig. 1).

When analyzing the exhibition design projects themselves, several overarching similarities between the two exhibitions are evident from their very titles, which in both cases emphasize the intention to use the pop culture of manga and contemporary graphic production as a starting point for a complex narrative intertwining and mobilizing myths, traditions, and subjects, as well as traditional dress and fashion, with the aim of offering an economic, artistic, and social prism through which to interpret Japanese culture. The issue of the pronounced typological diversity of the works on display and of the variety of supports dedicated to them – central to both exhibitions – fur-

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1

Fig. 1: Entrance of the exposition *Graphic Japan: From Hokusai to Manga* at the Museo Civico Archeologico in Bologna. Photo of the authors.

ther underscores the essential role of architectural exhibition design in shaping and enabling the perception of a complex network of visual connections, recurring symbols, and intersecting gazes among objects that are extremely heterogeneous in nature.

In this context, two technical display strategies appear particularly effective in facilitating the simultaneous perception of this network of *fils rouges*. On the one hand, the use of crisp, sharply defined lighting at the Musée Guimet allows the visitor's visual field to be framed and selectively focused, guiding the gaze and thereby emphasizing significant aspects, recurring details, and repeated elements (Fig. 2). On the other hand, the use of diagonal vertical elements arranged in a zigzag pattern within the Museo Civico Archeologico of Bologna makes it possible to create unexpected sightlines and to visually connect multiple points of the exhibition simultaneously with greater ease than in more conventional orthogonal layouts[22] (Fig. 3).

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The emergence of the strong architectural identity of the Bologna installation originates in fashion and, more specifically, draws inspiration from pleating techniques and from the work of Issey Miyake[23] (Fig. 4). From this perspective, two kimonos by the Japanese designer, positioned at the ends of one of the central galleries, function as a "hinge of connection" for the exhibition as a whole. These works, which combine traditional and modern graphic elements through a technique that merges the folding of fabric with the folding of paper, make it possible to achieve coherence – as Naori Tamazoe had emphasized – between the artists' work and the forms of the exhibition layout. These folded-panel displays, which also find resonance in some of the historical accordion-folded scrolls featured in the exhibition, made it possible to develop the entire show in a unified and recognizable manner by concentrating on a few fundamental principles. On the one hand, the architect sought to keep the perimeter walls of the exhibition space as free as possible, concentrating display elements at the center of the galleries; on the other, the aim was to develop a simple, essential, and contemporary project. Although the elements designed by Panstudio conceal an extremely meticulous study of construction details that make their realization possible (Fig. 5), they were conceived to be structurally simple – thanks to the angled arrangement of the vertical panels, which largely eliminates the need for additional supports – and to create a large number of thematic micro-sections with a minimal number of panels. This minimalist approach, which nonetheless emerges from a complex design process, not only enables the creation of a clear and easily legible path for visitors[24], but also allows for significant material savings, with a substantial impact on both the economic and environmental costs of these temporary exhibitions (Fig. 6). This reflection on the careful use of materials was, in the case of *Graphic Japan*, extended to the use of carpeting as well. Whereas in previous exhibitions at the Museo Civico Archeologico of Bologna the floors had been entirely covered with new, colored carpeting, in this instance it was decided to use smaller sections of carpet, precisely positioned so as to echo the patterns and decorative motifs already present in the galleries' floors[25] (Fig. 7).

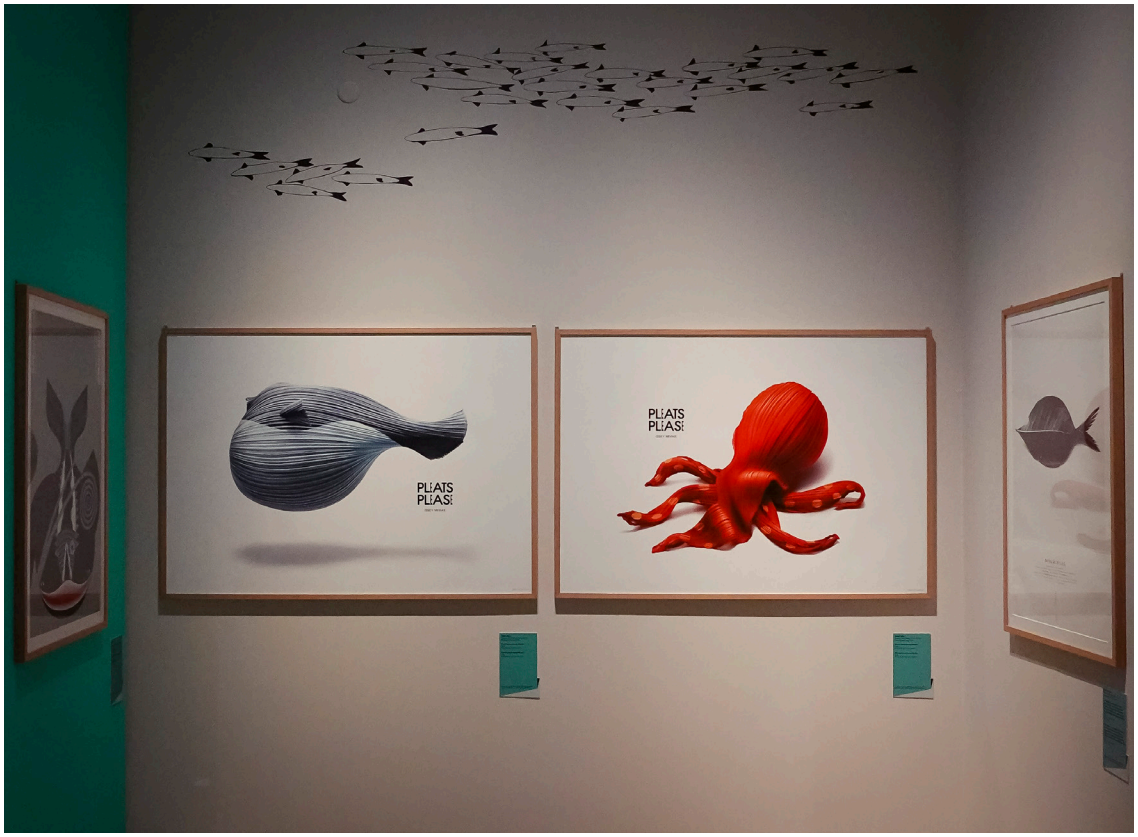


Fig. 2: Display dedicated to young girls' mangas in the exhibitions *Manga. Tout un art! De la tradition japonaise à la pop culture* at the Musée Guimet in Paris. Photo of the authors.

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4

Fig. 3:
Graphic Japan: From Hokusai to Manga at the Museo Civico Archeologico in Bologna. Photo of the authors.

Fig. 4:
Graphic Japan: From Hokusai to Manga at the Museo Civico Archeologico in Bologna. Photo of the authors.

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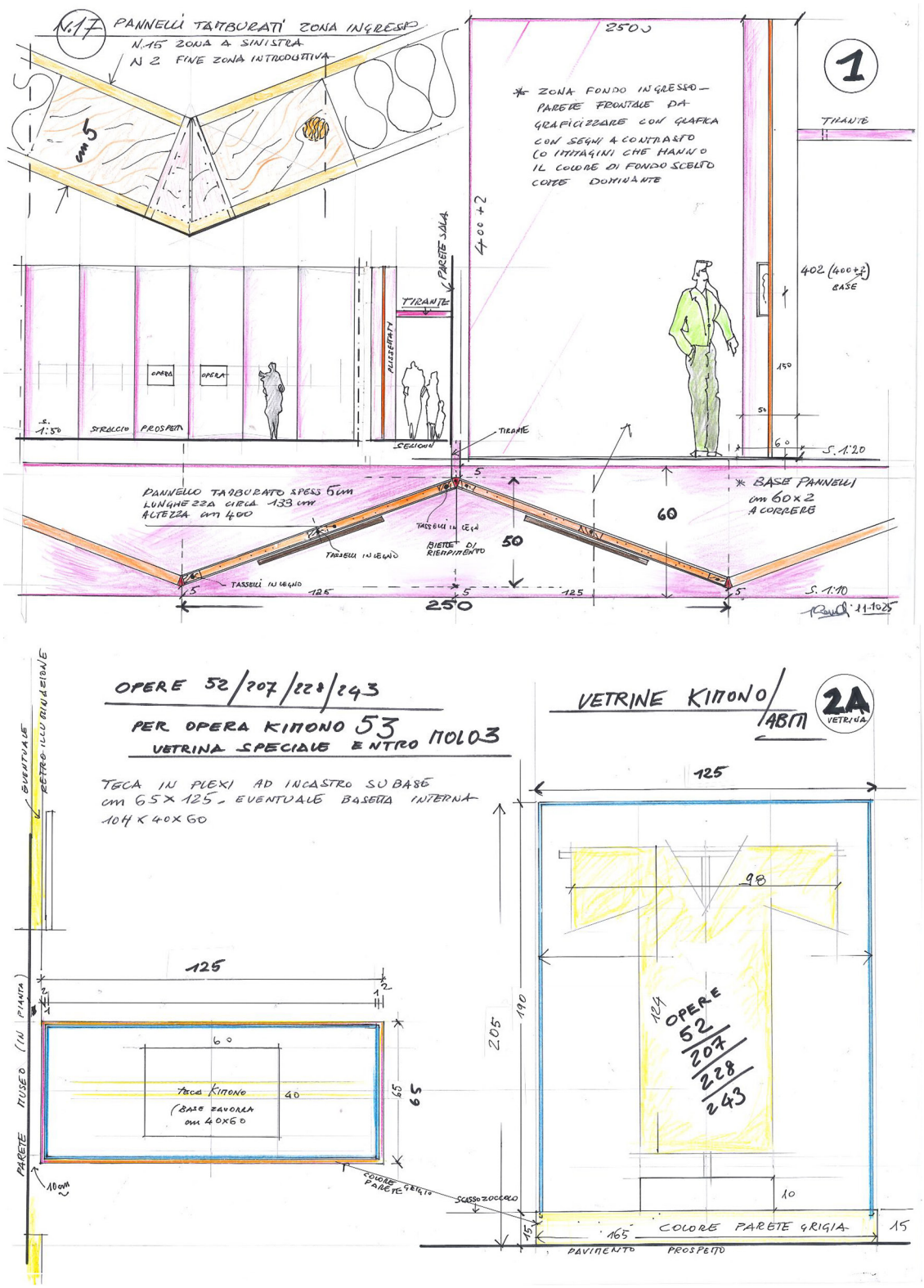
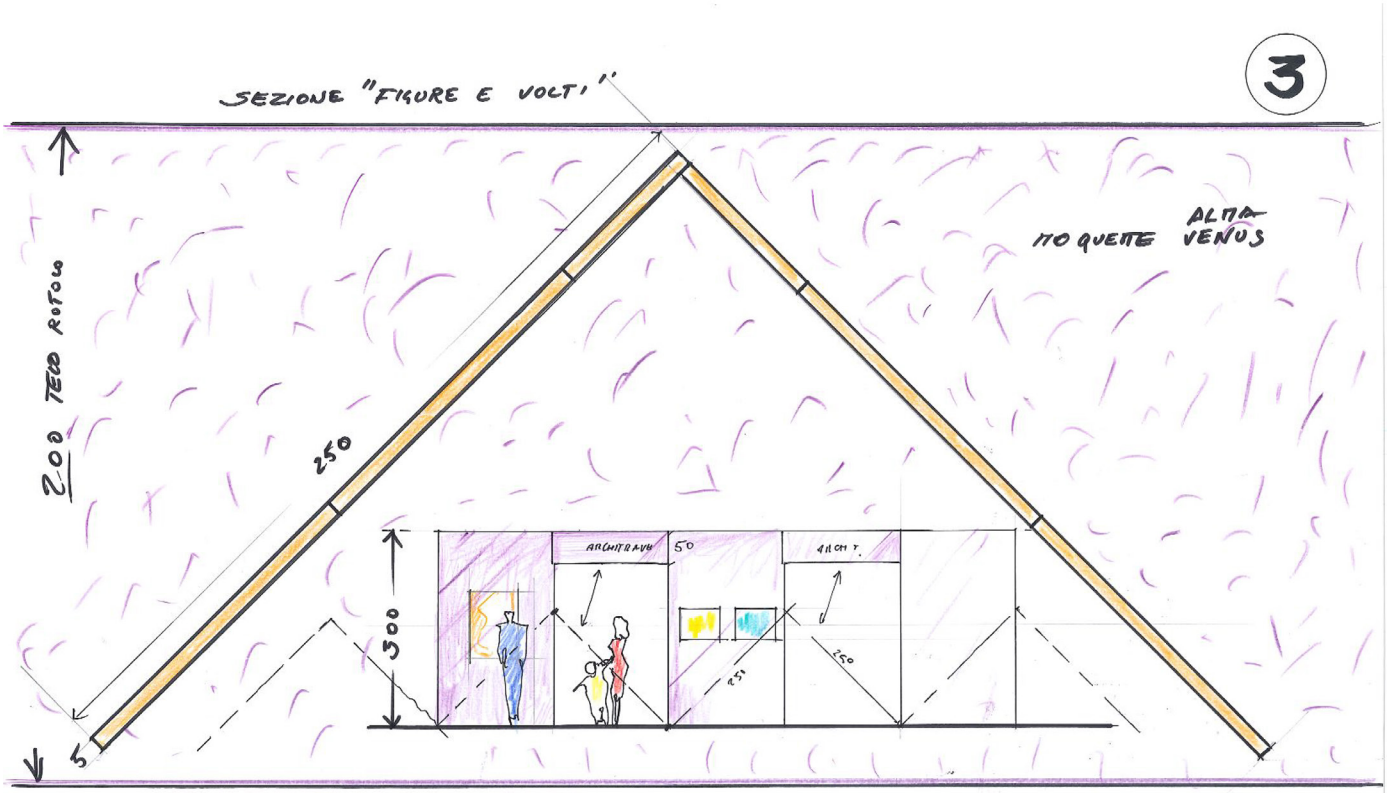
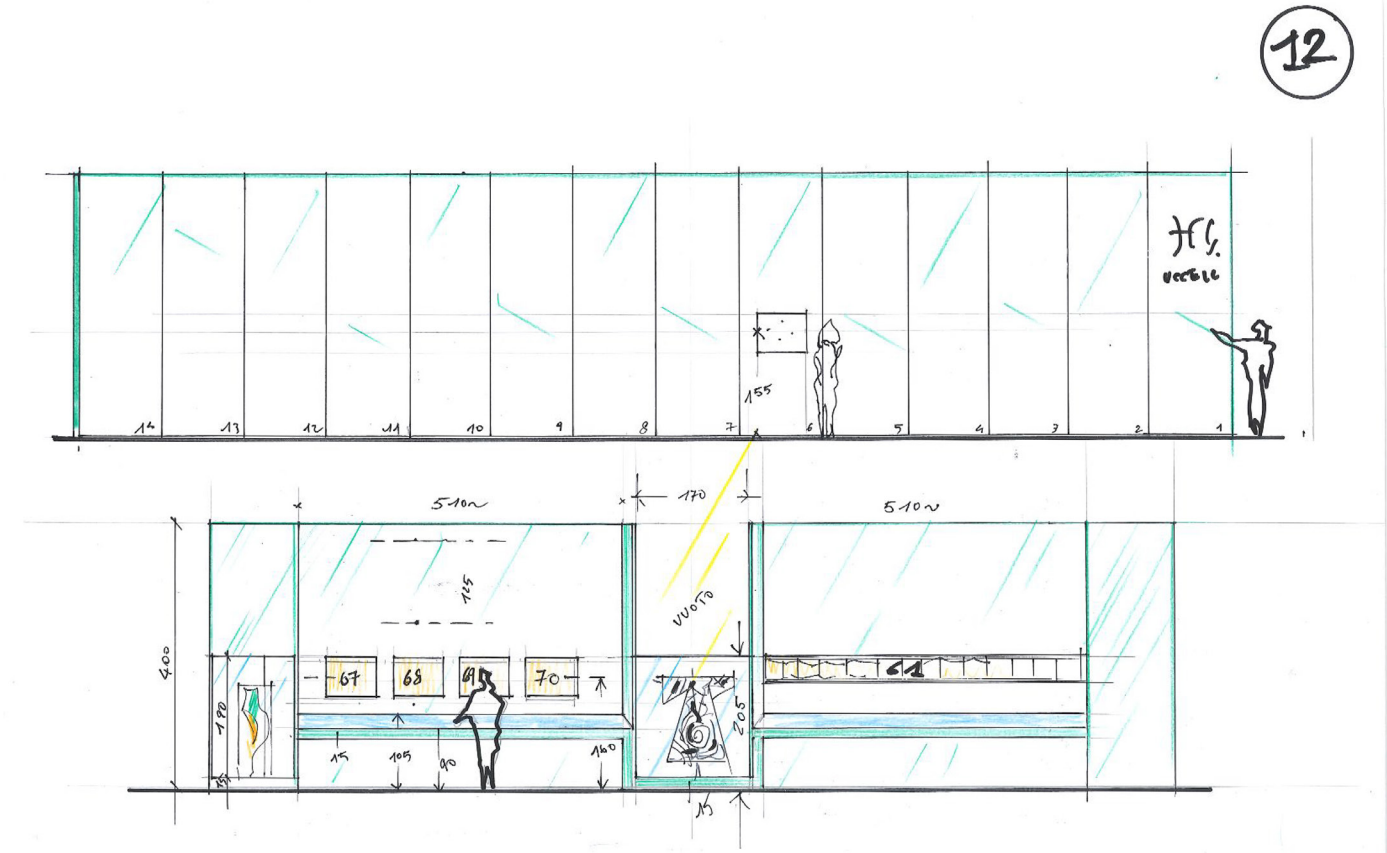


Fig. 5 and 6: Preliminary sketches realised by architect Paolo Caponcelli in preparation for the exhibition Graphic Japan: From Hokusai to Manga at the Museo Civico Archeologico in Bologna. © PanStudio Architetti Associati.

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Federico Maria Giorgi, Alessandro Paolo Lena
Exhibiting Japan: Displays and Narratives of Japanese Graphic Design in Paris and Bologna
https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24559





7-8

Other display choices shared by the two exhibitions appear to derive directly from the nature of the objects on view. It is difficult not to notice the almost identical display cases in which idealized bookshelves filled with manga and other related objects are recreated (Figg. 8–9). Similarly, both exhibitions feature a number of showcases extending several meters in length, designed to present certain paper scrolls – rebound as accordion-fold books – in their entirety (Fig. 10). This is a particular case not only because of the dimensions of the materials on display, but also because of the way they are read, from right to left, which therefore requires specific curatorial adjustments: at the Musée Guimet, for example, a label accompanied by an arrow reminds visitors of the correct reading order. The artistic model and editorial process of manga, whose modern definition is commonly traced back to Katsushika Hokusai,[26] are thus presented by moving beyond the theme of comic drawing alone, which is nevertheless articulated in both exhibitions as a fully-fledged artistic form. The aesthetics of Hokusai's prints and the graphic legacy[27] of the *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*, and in particular of works such as *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*,[28] invite viewers to reflect on the long genesis and aesthetic continuity of products that today also possess considerable commercial value.[29] Alongside this historical reflection, another theme that runs through the galleries of both exhibitions concerns the relationship with the West in terms of aesthetics, myths, and perhaps above all ways of engaging with Japan's cultural heritage – an exhibition narrative that, nevertheless, follows different paths and structures in each case, from which a particularly fruitful comparison can emerge.

Fig. 7: *Graphic Japan: From Hokusai to Manga* at the Museo Civico Archeologico in Bologna. Photo of the authors.

Fig. 8: *Graphic Japan: From Hokusai to Manga* at the Museo Civico Archeologico in Bologna. Photo of the authors.

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24559



9

Fig. 9:
Manga. Tout un art! De la tradition japonaise à la pop culture at the Musée Guimet in Paris. Photo of the authors.

While both exhibitions clearly originate from a desire to investigate the reasons behind the enduring success of Japanese graphic production and to highlight the evolution of its techniques, materials, and iconographies, beyond these initial similarities the differences are in fact numerous. Like an origami, the routes of both exhibitions unfold through the alternation of different "folds," within which, however, the division of works follows criteria that profoundly differentiate the perspectives brought to bear on the objects on display. In Paris, manga constitute the true focus of the exhibition, which is developed largely according to an author-based structure.[30] In Bologna, by contrast, manga represent the point of arrival of a path organized not so much by authors as by subjects, articulated through four thematic sections: *Motifs of Nature*, *Faces and Masks*, *Calligraphy and Typography*, and *Japonisme* (Fig. 11).[31]

The itinerary of *Manga. Tout un art!* therefore follows a chronological order in which display elements act both as separators and as connective hinges between authors from different periods, alternating – through the use of color – distinct triangular monographic galleries. While color also plays an important role in *Graphic Japan* as a means of distinguishing the exhibition's main sections, in this case it remains much more uniform within the galleries, where the existing architectural elements generate a fluid route and a continuous spatial environment in which groups of related works can be easily identified through a limited number of clear display devices. The element that most clearly differentiates the two exhibitions, however, is the curatorial gaze and the exhibition strategies associated with fashion objects. Whereas in

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10



11

Bologna traditional and contemporary kimonos are displayed in simple vitrines, in which a horizontal element supports and flattens the garments so as to make their graphic designs as legible as possible – thus rendering explicit and intelligible the passage from pattern design to the actual production of clothing (Fig. 12) – in Paris the garments are consistently presented on mannequins to demonstrate their real and everyday use. In the final gallery of the exhibition, they are articulated autonomously in the form of a veritable runway, surrounded by seating for visitors and accompanied by immersive atmospheres and digital projections of fashion shows (Fig. 13).

Fig. 10: *Manga. Tout un art! De la tradition japonaise à la pop culture* at the Musée Guimet in Paris. Photo of the authors.

Fig. 11: *Graphic Japan: From Hokusai to Manga* at the Museo Civico Archeologico in Bologna. Photo of the authors.

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12

Fig. 12:
Graphic Japan: From Hokusai to Manga at the Museo Civico Archeologico in Bologna. Photo of the authors.

Narrative Strategies and Mediation through the Prism of Fashion[32]

In Western exhibitions devoted to Japanese culture, museum storytelling[33] plays a decisive role in mediating a historically stratified visual tradition for audiences whose familiarity with its references and conventions is uneven. Narrative structures and mediation devices thus function as interpretive frameworks capable of articulating relationships among images, techniques, and systems of meaning that are historically and culturally distant from the viewers' own visual experience.

It is within this perspective that the exhibitions *Manga. Tout un art!* and *Graphic Japan* can be situated, as both projects engage with questions of continuity and transformation in Japanese graphic culture in relation to contemporary visual production, while adopting distinct narrative strategies. Within these exhibition itineraries, fashion assumes a specific analytical role as a domain in which the graphic sign moves beyond the two-dimensional image to articulate itself through objects and bodies. This shift renders visible the passage between project and form, offering an effective interpretive lens for examining the dynamics of circulation, appropriation, and reformulation of the Japanese visual imaginary within the European museum context.

Such an approach resonates with critical reflections that have highlighted the capacity of certain visual languages to enter the public sphere without relinquishing complexity. As observed by Ingrid Sischy and Germano Celant, the overcoming of traditional oppositions between autonomous art and applied production, high and low culture, the unique and the serial does not result in a loss of symbolic density, but rather in a transformation of regimes of visibility and modes of public access.[34] From this perspec-

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Fig. 13:
Manga. Tout un art! De la tradition japonaise à la pop culture at the Musée Guimet in Paris. Photo of the authors.

Federico Maria Giorgi, Alessandro Paolo Lena
Exhibiting Japan: Displays and Narratives of Japanese Graphic Design in Paris and Bologna
https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24559

tive, fashion may be understood as a system of abstract signs characterized by acceleration, proliferation, and the continuous renegotiation of meaning, which foregrounds the need for mediation practices capable of operating beyond the immediately visible surface. This shift is made explicit by the decision of Sischy and Celant to feature a photograph of a creation by Issey Miyake on the cover of the American journal *Artforum* in 1982, an editorial choice that positioned fashion within the visual and symbolic economy of contemporary art and recognized it as an artistic language rather than as a purely applied or commercial practice. The work of Issey Miyake clarifies how the garment can function as a mnemonic and projectual device grounded in transformation and in the reactivation of historical models,[35] and how, through pleating, modularity, and the dialogue between natural and artificial processes, clothing becomes a space of negotiation between past and present, East and West, operating effectively across both critical discourse and exhibition-based narratives devoted to Japanese culture.

This line of interpretation finds further support in critical approaches that frame fashion as a liminal field and as a space of epistemic tension capable of destabilizing established artistic categories.[36] When integrated into exhibition storytelling, fashion thus emerges as a privileged analytical tool for examining the processes of "artification"[37] and institutionalization through which Japanese graphic culture is translated, recontextualized, and renegotiated within the European museum space.

On a more strictly museological level, exhibitions of Japanese fashion in Western contexts have played an active role in processes of cultural legitimation, often operating beyond the boundaries of the national framework.[38] In these contexts, clothing functions as a form of cultural mediation, capable of traversing geographical, institutional, and symbolic spheres. The musealization of an object conceived for the body and for use introduces structural tensions that require careful curatorial negotiation, particularly with regard to the restitution of its processual and performative dimensions. Such tensions foreground the importance of narrative strategies and visual comparison in articulating dress not as a static artifact, but as a practice situated at the intersection of image, movement, and social use.[39]

From a complementary perspective, exhibition display may be understood as a discursive act through which meaning is produced by selection, juxtaposition, and spatial sequencing.[40] Within exhibitions devoted to Japanese visual culture, fashion proves especially effective in establishing relationships among images, illustrated books, and garments, thereby rendering historical continuities and formal affinities legible. Meaning does not reside exclusively in the objects themselves but emerges from their arrangement and from the visual itinerary constructed for the visitor, who is conceived as an active participant in the process of signification rather than as a passive recipient of information.[41]

The exhibition *Manga. Tout un art!* proposes a long-term narrative

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aimed at reconstructing the genealogy of manga within the Japanese graphic tradition, positioning it at the intersection of historical production, popular culture, and the global cultural industry. Its narrative framework privileges a broad chronological progression, articulated through thematic clusters that make it possible to relate works, techniques, and imaginaries from different periods and contexts, without resorting to a rigidly disciplinary subdivision.

The first section is devoted to the historical antecedents of manga, in which *ukiyo-e* prints, illustrated books, and premodern iconographic repertoires are presented as visual matrices of a serial and disseminative image culture. Here, the graphic dimension is already placed in dialogue with material and sartorial culture. Alongside printed images, elements of historical dress, including samurai garments and accessories (Figg.14-15), situate graphic production within a broader visual economy that extends to the body and to socially codified forms of representation. The storytelling thus foregrounds the construction of figurative models intended for wide circulation, emphasizing continuity across artistic practices, publishing, and material culture, not through linear genealogy but through the persistence of narrative structures, compositional strategies, and modes of image reception.

14

The exhibition goes on to frame modern manga as an autonomous narrative language that is nonetheless structurally open to transmedial circulation.[42] Rather than offering a purely historical account, the display foregrounds the editorial, generic, and authorial conditions through which manga emerged as a mass cultural system capable of producing shared imaginaries and codified visual regimes beyond the printed page. It is within this framework that fashion enters the exhibition, not as ornament or citation, but as a critical site of translation in which the graphic sign is rearticulated through the body and the object (Fig. 16). By tracing the passage of manga aesthetics into garments and design, the exhibition makes visible manga's capacity to traverse media, cultural practices, and economic circuits. The final section consolidates



Fig. 14: *Manga. Tout un art! De la tradition japonaise à la pop culture* at the Musée Guimet in Paris. Photo of the authors.

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Fig. 15:
Manga. Tout un art! De la tradition japonaise à la pop culture at the Musée Guimet in Paris. Photo of the authors.

this argument by situating manga within a broader network of fashion, design, and contemporary pop culture (Fig. 17), where collaborations with luxury and haute couture render explicit its transformation from an editorial language into a global symbolic resource.

From the perspective of audience engagement, the exhibition adopts an inclusive strategy aimed at addressing visitors with differing levels of expertise and familiarity. The alternation of historical works and contemporary materials, together with the use of mediation devices, constructs a visitor experience grounded in recognition and visual continuity rather than in specialist depth. This approach is made explicit in the room dedicated to Hokusai's *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*, where the original print is displayed alongside works by contemporary comic artists and a haute couture dress by Dior inspired by the iconic image, a curatorial gesture that foregrounds processes of citation, influence, and recontextualization across time and media (Fig. 18). In this framework, *Manga. Tout un art!* articulates a model of museum storytelling in which manga, also through the integration of fashion, functions as a key device for examining the circulation and cultural legitimation of Japanese graphic production within the contemporary European context.

Similarly, the exhibition *Graphic Japan* proposes an interpretation of Japanese graphic tradition grounded in a thematic and process-oriented narrative that privileges relationships among images, techniques, and supports over linear chronology. The itinerary unfolds through conceptual clusters spanning the full historical arc of graphic production, foregrounding structural continuities and formal recurrences rather than stylistic ruptures or author-centered genealogies.[43]

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Graphic production is therefore presented as an integrated cultural system operating across the image, the object, and social use. Prints, illustrated books, matrices, and textiles are arranged to make visible processes of transfer and transformation of the sign across different supports, emphasizing the historical permeability between fine arts,

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17

Fig. 16:
Manga. Tout un art! De la tradition japonaise à la pop culture at the Musée Guimet in Paris. Photo of the authors.

Fig. 17:
Manga. Tout un art! De la tradition japonaise à la pop culture at the Musée Guimet in Paris. Photo of the authors.

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24559



18

craftsmanship, and applied practices[44] (Fig. 19). Rather than tracing a progressive evolution toward manga, the storytelling highlights enduring visual logics such as seriality, modulation of the sign, and the relationship between figure and surface.

In this context, fashion and dress occupy a central, transversal position. Kimonos, decorated textiles, and production matrices are presented as key elements for observing continuity between design, decoration, and use, underscoring the systemic character of Japanese visual culture. A particularly significant role is played by *katagami*, which makes explicit the passage from drawing to textile decoration, allowing viewers to visualize a project culture founded on reproducibility and variation. Through these devices, the exhibition renders legible the structural relationship between graphic design and fashion, highlighting how seriality and modulation of the sign precede by centuries the Western distinction between fine and applied arts.

Reflection on the body and on the representation of identity reaches a point of particular intensity in the woodblock prints by Tōshūsai Sharaku,[45] in which clothing contributes decisively to the construction of figurative typologies. In actor portraits, kimonos, hairstyles, and accessories actively participate in the definition of roles, postures, and expressive tensions, making dress an essential narrative element of the image. In this sense, fashion emerges as a codified language, fully integrated into the graphic system and into the construction of meaning (Fig. 20). In the same exhibition section, the creations of Issey Miyake function as nodes of connection between tradition and contemporaneity.[46] Their placement does not follow the logic of spectacular contrast, but rather a narrative strategy that invites visitors to recognize structural affin-

Fig. 18: *Manga. Tout un art! De la tradition japonaise à la pop culture* at the Musée Guimet in Paris. Photo of the authors.

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19



20

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24559



Fig. 19:
Graphic Japan: From Hokusai to Manga at the Museo Civico Archeologico in Bologna. Photo of the authors.

Fig. 20:
Graphic Japan: From Hokusai to Manga at the Museo Civico Archeologico in Bologna. Photo of the authors.

Fig. 21:
Graphic Japan: From Hokusai to Manga at the Museo Civico Archeologico in Bologna. Photo of the authors.

ities between historical practices and recent design research.

From the perspective of museum storytelling, the analysis of the two exhibitions highlights how, within the recent European museum landscape, Japanese graphic culture is addressed as a complex cultural system shaped by historical continuities, technical transformations, and processes of global image circulation. In both cases, storytelling plays a central role in rendering this complexity intelligible, organizing heterogeneous materials and diverse audiences within coherent narrative frameworks. Within this context, fashion emerges as a shared language, albeit one that performs markedly different functions in the two projects.

In the Bologna exhibition, fashion does not operate as a device of transmedial recognition, but instead assumes a predominantly comparative and cognitive role. Embedded within a thematic and process-oriented narrative, kimonos, textiles, and matrices function as tools of technical intelligibility, making visible the passage from drawing to surface, from project to object, and from image to body (Fig. 21). Rather than activating a shared pop imaginary, clothing contributes to clarifying the deep structures of Japanese graphic tradition, emphasizing its historical continuity and systemic dimension. Within this framework, the integration of images, matrices, garments, and objects enables the legibility of processes of graphic production and transfer (Figg. 22-23), positioning fashion less as a thematic focus than as an analytical tool for reading the interrelation of image, body, and social use.

21

In the Paris exhibition, instead, fashion operates as a device of recognition and transmediality, capable of immediately activating the audience's imaginary and situating manga within a global visual ecosystem. Through clothing, the manga graphic sign acquires a performative articulation that highlights its capacity to traverse media, supports, and production spheres, from publishing to the fashion industry. This is perhaps most vividly seen in the phenomenon of cosplay,[47] where fans embody manga characters through costume and performance, further extending manga's influence into everyday life and global popular culture. From fan practices to high fashion, these logics persist: the collaborations between luxury maisons and manga authors docu-

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24559

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mented in the exhibition catalogue illustrate how, since the early 2000s, manga aesthetics have assumed the status of a true transmedial cultural language.[48] In these cases, fashion does not simply reference a pre-existing imaginary, but adopts manga's narrative codes, translating seriality, character construction, and chromatic intensity into sartorial forms conceived to activate storytelling and extend manga's field of action beyond the editorial medium.

In both contexts, the exhibition space emerges as a site for the critical organization of the global circulation of images (Fig. 24). Through narrative choices, display strategies, and mediation devices, the museum intervenes in shaping processes of cultural translation that bring graphic tradition, popular production, and contemporary reinterpretation into dialogue. It is precisely in the capacity to articulate differences between performativity and process, recognition and comparison, that one of the central challenges of museum storytelling devoted to Japanese graphic culture in Europe is negotiated today.

22



Conclusions

The exhibitions *Manga. Tout un art!* and *Graphic Japan* present themselves as parallel and, in many respects, complementary responses to key challenges currently shaping museum practice devoted to Japanese visual culture in Europe. Conceived to address broad and intergenerational audiences, both projects deploy forms of display and mediation capable of engaging non-specialist visitors – particularly younger generations – without

23



https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24559



24

Fig. 22: *Graphic Japan: From Hokusai to Manga* at the Museo Civico Archeologico in Bologna. Photo of the authors.

Fig. 23: *Graphic Japan: From Hokusai to Manga* at the Museo Civico Archeologico in Bologna. Photo of the authors.

Fig. 24: *Graphic Japan: From Hokusai to Manga* at the Museo Civico Archeologico in Bologna. Photo of the authors.

resorting to a simplification of content. Instead, audience accessibility becomes the occasion for a strategic reconfiguration of exhibition narratives.

Together, the two exhibitions testify both to the persistence of a long-standing European fascination with Japan and to the cultural and economic centrality acquired by contemporary forms of graphic and popular visual production. Within this framework, manga emerges as an emblematic site of tension between artistic legitimacy and mass entertainment, occupying an intermediate position that museums are increasingly called upon to interrogate rather than resolve.

The comparison between the two projects highlights divergent curatorial strategies for addressing this ambiguity. In Paris, manga is framed as a global and transmedial language, immediately mobilizing the public imaginary and entering into dialogue with fashion, design, publishing, and the luxury industry. In Bologna, Japanese graphic culture is approached as a *longue durée* visual system, in which images, matrices, textiles, and garments reveal processes of continuity, transfer, and transformation across media and historical contexts. In both cases, exhibition architecture and museum storytelling play a decisive role in orienting the visitor's gaze and in making curatorial choices legible.

This plurality of perspectives is coherently extended in the respective catalogues, which function not merely as documentation but as critical spaces in their own right. Through the interplay of architecture, narrative, and mediation, the two exhibitions ultimately demonstrate how Japanese graphic culture can be addressed today as a complex and dynamic field in which tradition and contemporaneity, art and entertainment, visual culture and global consumption do not cancel each other out, but are mutually constitutive and productively interrogated within the museum space.

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Endnotes:

1 Opened from 19 November 2025 to 9 March 2026, the exhibition was curated by Estelle Bauer, curator of the Japanese collections at the Musée Guimet, and by journalist Didier Pasamonik.

2 Opened from 20 November 2025 to 6 April 2026, the exhibition was organized by MondoMostre and curated by Rossella Menegazzo and Eleonora Lanza.

3 From the 1860s onward, following the opening of treaty ports, increasing numbers of foreign nationals settled in Japan for commercial and diplomatic purposes. Port cities such as Yokohama, Kobe, Hakodate, and Nagasaki developed rapidly into hybrid environments where Japanese customs and Western practices coexisted and influenced one another. In order to study Western institutions and industrial techniques firsthand, the Japanese government organized the Iwakura Mission in 1871, led by Foreign Minister Tomomi Iwakura. Comprising officials, technicians, translators, and students tasked with learning European production methods and collecting manufactured goods, the delegation also visited the Vienna World Exhibition in 1873, where Japan participated for the first time as an official exhibitor with a national pavilion. See Lanza 2025, pp. 17-18.

4 See Mears 2008.

5 The author of this section is Federico Maria Giorgi, PhD candidate at the DABC Department of the Politecnico di Milano and at the EVCAU Laboratory of Université Paris Cité.

6 In addition to the experiences discussed above, mention should also be made of the exhibition *À portée d'Asie*, held at the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon from 20 October 2023 to 5 February 2024, where an immersive scenographic design inspired by the traditional colors of lacquerware objects was developed.

7 From 20 October 2017 to 5 March 2018.

8 The exhibition scenography was developed in collaboration with SANAA and is particularly reminiscent of the subsequent work carried out for the Galerie du Temps at the Louvre-Lens in 2024.

9 AtoY studio website, *Japonorama*, https://atelier-atoy.com/japonarama/ (accessed 26 December 2025).

10 From 9 November 2022 to 21 January 2023.

11 From 15 November 2018 to 3 March 2019.

12 Some spaces on the second floor can host "micro-exhibitions" that are complementary to, or independent from, the larger exhibitions held on the underground level. This is a particularly relevant aspect in the case of *Manga. Tout un art!*, as the section *Avant les mangas* closed on 26 January 2026, more than one month before the rest of the exhibition.

13 See the article on light design published in the *Architecture and Displays* section of the third issue of *MMD*: Giorgi 2025, pp. 229–248.

14 Musée national des arts asiatiques – Guimet, from 16 March 2022 to 29 August 2022.

15 It is important to note in this context that *Power Rangers* represent one of the most well-known examples of the Western adaptation of an East Asian television program, as the series reused combat scenes from *Super Sentai*, re-editing and intercutting them with newly filmed sequences featuring American actors.

16 Paolo Capponcelli is also the author of the volume *Mille disegni dal vero. Architetture, luoghi, personaggi. Carnets 1980–2023*, 2024.

17 For a more comprehensive understanding of Panstudio's design and museographic activity, reference should be made to commissions for the Vatican Museums, including the exhibitions of the Vatican Treasures in the United States, Mexico, and the Philippines

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during apostolic visits; for the Regional Province of Palermo (Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea at Palazzo Sant'Elia); for the Venice Biennale (exhibition design for the 2001 Venice Film Festival); and for the Borromeo Islands Administration (Doll Museum at the Rocca di Angera). For municipal administrations, Panstudio has realized the "Giorgio Morandi" Documentation Center in Grizzana, the Civic Museums of Rimini, the Santarcangelo Archaeological History Museum, the Museo del Tricolore in Reggio Emilia, the Barletta Museum Hub, and the reinstallation of the Modern and Contemporary Mosaics section of the MAR in Ravenna. Panstudio has also overseen the creation of the Archaeological Park of Ebla and the renovation and new installation of the Idlib Museum in Syria.

18 Palazzo Albergati, Bologna, from 24 March to 9 September 2018.

19 Two figures to whom a dedicated section is also devoted in the current exhibition *Graphic Japan*.

20 The exhibition was conceived as a continuation of the initiatives launched in 2016 to mark the 150th anniversary of bilateral relations between Italy and Japan, a milestone that also saw the Municipality of Bologna involved in other cultural projects, including exhibitions devoted to Giorgio Morandi in Kobe, Tokyo, and Iwate. MondoMostre–Skira, for its part, has curated exhibitions dedicated to Hokusai, Hiroshige, and Utamaro at Palazzo Reale in Milan; *Hokusai* at the Ara Pacis in Rome; *Masterpieces of Japanese Buddhist Sculpture* at the Scuderie del Quirinale in Rome; and *Kuniyoshi. Visionary of the Floating World* at the Museo della Permanente in Milan.

21 Challenges with which Panstudio is well acquainted, particularly through the experience gained with the exhibition *I pittori di Pompei*, also realized in collaboration with MondoMostre from 23 September 2022 to 19 March 2023. That exhibition was characterized not only by the constraints imposed by the exhibition space, but also by the need to address significant issues related to the considerable weight and large dimensions of the Pompeian frescoes on display.

22 A clear example of this strategy is the transparent display element used in the first gallery to house a kimono. The case allows visitors to view both the front and the back of the garment, while also enabling sightlines on either side toward the graphic elements that inspired its decorative motifs, as well as toward the cut paper stencils used to create patterns during the dyeing of textiles.

23 Stemming from this insight, which originated during a visit to one of the Japanese designer's stores while traveling in New York, the exhibition includes not only several kimonos inspired by traditional Japanese graphic design, but also a selection of graphic works created for the brand's *Pleats Please* advertising campaigns.

24 An emblematic example of this approach is the diagonal wall installed in the gallery entirely devoted to the theme of Mount Fuji. Through a single diagonal element, the visitor's route is rendered immediately clear, first along one side of the panel and then along the other.

25 This careful attention to the use of materials was also extended to the creation of the educational room, requested by the commissioning body toward the end of the design process, for which leftover carpet offcuts from the exhibition were reused to create a floor with an abstract geometric pattern.

26 Marquet 2025, p.10.

27 In his hanging scroll paintings, and above all through his polychrome woodblock prints, the artist was able to interpret the world in which he lived in a new way, employing free and rapid lines and a masterful use of color, particularly Prussian blue, which had only recently been imported into Japan, drawing inspiration both from indigenous pictorial traditions and from techniques derived from Western art.

28 Pasamonik 2025, pp. 62-65.

29 For an initial critical bibliography, see the exhibition catalogue *Manga. Tout un*

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art! 2025, pp. 203–207.

30 The historical dimension, drawing on outstanding works from the Musée Guimet collections, was organized in a separate space on the first floor with its own exhibition schedule.

31 The exhibition continues the exploration of relations between Italy and Japan developed in the context of Expo Osaka 2025.

32 The author of this section is Alessandro Paolo Lena, PhD in Visual, Performing and Media Arts from the University of Bologna and in Art History from Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne.

33 For critical reflections on storytelling in museums, see Gottschall 2014; Bodo, Mascheroni, and Panigada 2016; Cataldo 2017; Dal Maso 2018; De Bideran and Bourdaa 2021; Costa, Cordera, Poulot 2022.

34 Sischy, Celant 1982, p. 34.

35 Sischy, Celant 1982, p. 35.

36 On fashion as a liminal field in the artworld, see in particular Hammen, Rousseau 2024a. On the display of fashion as art, see Petrov 2019, pp. 91-112.

37 Hammen, Rousseau 2024b, p. 12. The authors ground their analysis in Roberta Shapiro's definition of *artification* as "le processus de transformation du non-art en art, résultat d'un travail complexe qui engendre un changement de définition et de statut des personnes, des objets, et des activités." Shapiro 2012, p. 20.

38 Mears 2008, pp. 96-99.

39 Mears 2008, pp. 108-113.

40 On exhibition of textiles as a discursive construction, see Petrov 2019, pp. 6-8.

41 For a deeper analysis of these themes, see Petrov 2019, pp. 100-105, 137-145, 184-186.

42 On transmedia storytelling, see in particular De Bideran, Bourdaa 2021; Scolari 2025.

43 The exhibition itinerary is mirrored in the accompanying catalogue which follows the same sectional structure. See *Graphic Japan* 2025.

44 In the catalogue of the exhibition, Eleonora Lanza explains that: "i disegnatori di questi nuovi modelli erano illustratori-designer (*zuanka*), ideatori dei disegni (*zuan*) destinati a un'ampia gamma di applicazioni: dai modelli per kimono di lusso ai motivi decorativi per ceramiche, ventagli, lacche e suppellettili, dalle cartoline ai manifesti. Il concetto di un artista che lavorasse esclusivamente per creare disegni era una novità per i giapponesi, poiché, fino ad allora, spesso era lo stesso artigiano che creava e applicava un disegno su tessuto. La parola tradizionale giapponese per disegno era *moyo* (motivo), mentre i termini *zuan* e poi *dessin* (dal francese) furono due nuove parole aggiunte alla lingua giapponese nel periodo Meiji che porta vano con sé le sfumature di 'nuovo', 'moderno', 'esotico'"; Lanza 2025, p. 18.

45 *Graphic Japan* 2025, pp. 194-195.

46 *Graphic Japan* 2025, p. 193.

47 See Pinon 2025.

48 Samuel, Bléchet 2025, pp. 194-196. Aurélie Samuel and Alix Bléchet trace the intensification of manga aesthetics within luxury fashion from the early 2000s onward, describing the emergence of what they term a "mangagenic" approach to clothing. They highlight a series of emblematic collaborations, including Prada's costumes for *Appleseed Ex Machina* (2007), Gucci's 2013 Cruise collection developed with Araki Hirohiko, accompanied by the narrative *Jolyne, Fly High with Gucci*, as well as later partnerships with Oda Eiichirō and the creation of a Doraemon capsule collection. The authors note a

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marked increase since 2020 in collaborations between major fashion houses and manga licenses, underscoring manga's transition into a key symbolic and narrative resource for the luxury sector.

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MMD aims at promoting and enhancing the collaboration among researchers from the field of humanities, social sciences, architecture, and Digital Humanities through their complementary perspectives. It is addressed to scholars, students and professionals working in these specific disciplinary fields, but also readers interested in the current evolution of the debate on issues, methods and tools related to the material and immaterial aspects of museology in its relation to history and contemporaneity, and in connection with the progress of public welfare.