

Meeting of Japanese Art Specialists

February 2, 2020

Meeting Room 1, Heiseikan, Tokyo National Museum



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Purpose: Announcements, discussion and information exchange regarding operational problems faced by Japanese art curators and staff in other related museum departments in North America, Europe and Japan.

Venue: Meeting Room 1, Heiseikan, Tokyo National Museum

Chairman and Facilitator: Kawano Kazutaka, Head of the Research Division, Curatorial

Participants from North America

Laura Allen (Asian Art Museum of San Francisco)

Rosina Buckland (Royal Ontario Museum)

Frank Feltens (Freer Gallery of Art)

Andreas Marks (Minneapolis Institute of Art)

Anne Nishimura Morse (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

Rhiannon Paget (The Ringling Museum of Art)

Aaron Rio (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Stephen Salel (Honolulu Museum of Art)

Shinoda Yayoi (Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art)

Sinéad Vilbar (Cleveland Museum of Art)

Participants from Europe

Karwin Cheung (National Museum of Scotland)

Timothy Clark (The British Museum)

Rupert Faulkner (Victoria and Albert Museum)

Menno Fitski (Rijksmuseum Amsterdam)

Gregory Irvine (Victoria and Albert Museum)

Daan Kok (National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden)

Nadejda Maykova (Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography [the Kunstkamera])

Manuela Moscatiello (Musée Cernuschi)

Kate Newnham (Bristol Museum & Art Gallery)

Mary Redfern (Chester Beatty)

Wibke Schrape (Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg)

Alban von Stockhausen (Bern Historical Museum)

Khanh Trinh (Museum Rietberg Zürich)

Elizaveta Vaneian (The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts)

Bas Verberk (Museum for East-Asian Arts, Köln)

Cora Würmell (Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden)

Ainura Yusupova (The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts)

Participants from Japan

Kajiyama Hiroshi (Nakanoshima Kosetsu Museum of Art)

Furukawa Shoichi (The Museum Yamato Bunkakan)

Yasukouchi Yukie (Suntory Museum of Art)

Ito Chihiro (Eisei Bunko Museum)

Participants from National Institutes for Cultural Heritage

Kawano Kazutaka (Tokyo National Museum)

Imai Atsushi (Tokyo National Museum)

Kito Satomi (Tokyo National Museum)

Kurihara Yuji (Kyoto National Museum)

Tetsuo Furiya (Kyoto National Museum)

Melissa M. Rinne (Kyoto National Museum)

Fabienne Helfenberger (Kyoto National Museum)

Mary Lewine (Nara National Museum)

Kuwabara Yuzuko (Kyushu National Museum)

Yamanashi Emiko (Tokyo National Research Institute for Cultural Properties)

Emura Tomoko (Tokyo National Research Institute for Cultural Properties)

Maisawa Rei (Tokyo National Research Institute for Cultural Properties)

Summary

The Chair explained that the overall purpose of the meeting was not to produce one overarching conclusion or statement but rather to discuss various problems, build networks, and forge links between participants.

He then asked if anyone had any comments or questions about the previous day's symposium. With regards to the keynote speech, participants talked about how interesting they found the idea that the ideal museum would be one that fused the Tokyo National Museum with the National Museum of Ethnology and the National Museum of Japanese History. They also agreed that it was not a good thing that Japanese art was always spoken about in quotation marks and not treated the same as other fields of art. The organizers of the symposium talked about presenting the diversity of Japanese art to the general public and how the concept of Japanese art differed according to country, region, museum and curator. They added that it was probably better to speak about Japanese art within the context of various exchanges rather than as something restricted to within Japan's borders. Given this, and following on from the previous year's theme of "Beyond Orientalism and Occidentalism," the organizers said they had tried to show how the general public had many different views and ways of approaching 'Japanese art,' just as they had many different ways of viewing 'Japan.' They raised three points that had been discussed at the symposium: (1) The problem of what curators should exhibit (for example, should they prepare exhibits that visitors want to see or exhibits that challenge visitors?); (2) how to strike a balance between preserving curatorial integrity and financial success when staging exhibitions; (3) how to integrate technology into museum displays.

Participants discussed the phrase 'Japanese Art' and how it was better to discuss the 'Japanese Arts' in plural given that their museums exhibited fine arts like painting and sculpture alongside applied arts, modern artworks and photography, for example. They also said curators needed a purpose when deciding what to exhibit. They also expressed doubts about the idea of curators passing down explanations to the public in a one-sided manner. When it came to using technology, participants also said museums should prepare technology that allows visitors to make their own choices.

With regards to the presentation in the symposium about the Duchamp exhibition, A participant spoke about

the approach of using Asian rather than Western artworks. Another also spoke about how Japanese art is presented nowadays within the context of world art rather than as the product of just one country. There were introductions of several innovative ways museums had prepared thematic displays that mixed objects from their collections with cultural artifacts from various countries and regions. However, some participants expressed concerns that these kinds of activities could threaten the *raison d'être* of specialists. There was also a lively exchange of opinions about educational activities and the importance of approaching children in particular; the merits of using technology aimed at young people; and the necessity of educating people about how to appreciate Japanese art.

There were three 5-minute presentations around the break, followed by a discussions about the presentation themes.

Discussion 1: Japanese Collections for Creativity and Wellbeing

Presenter: Kate Newnham (Visual Arts, Bristol Museum & Art Gallery, UK)

Presentation overview

Japanese woodblock prints and graphic art such as *manga* have become part of popular culture in Western countries, a Bristol example being graffiti referencing Hokusai's work in Hillgrove Street, Bristol by M13 Crew and Phlegm (2009).

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery cares for 2,000 Japanese items including 500 woodblock prints. In 2018-19, we held a series of three free print exhibitions from our collections. We drew on the success of the British Museum's Hokusai exhibition (2017) by starting with Hokusai and Hiroshige landscapes. Secondly, we presented life in Edo-period cities and, thirdly, prints focused on nature and the changing seasons.

The exhibitions were presented in a small gallery, each with 60 prints. Their popularity exceeded our expectations, as they attracted over 127,000 visits: 31% of all visitors to the museum. 2,000 visitors completed an audience survey, which proved that the woodblock prints attracted a younger, more ethnically diverse audience than usual and also drew in visitors from a wider geographical area.

Visitors were very inspired by the prints and the techniques used to create them.

"Beautiful, dreamy, ethereal, thank you."

"Been thinking about doing some wood cut printing and it's been inspiring to see how the process has been completed."

We have anecdotal evidence that the prints prompted visitors ranging from school students to staff at a local digital games company (Meteor Pixel) to create their own work.

In a project with poetry consultancy Call of the Page we encouraged people to write haiku responding to the online versions of our exhibitions. Poets from 30 countries submitted 800 haiku based on Bristol's prints.

Public events such as a family activity day and an 'Ultra-Japan' evening for adults celebrating both traditional and contemporary aspects of Japanese culture drew capacity audiences. Adults as well as children were keen to play, for example by trying on *anime* costumes and *kimono*.

Visitor responses to Bristol's program suggest that Japanese collections have a powerful potential for stimulating creativity, social visits and good mental health. This seems to be due to a number of factors. People respond to the high levels of craftsmanship in Japanese art, its links with popular culture and what it reveals about Japanese faiths and beliefs, especially Buddhism. Finally as it has done in the past, Japanese art gives Western viewers the

opportunity to enter a different world.

After the presentation, an intriguing research outcome recently featured in *the British Medical Journal* was introduced by the presenter: people over fifty who go to museums and art galleries have a lower risk of premature death. The presenter added that her own medical doctor actually goes to galleries to see Japanese art in pursuit of healing. A participant pointed out that there are art-related programs designed to comfort former servicepersons.

Presentation 2: Sustainability and Curation

Presenter: Menno Fitski (Rijksmuseum Amsterdam):

Presentation overview

This presentation discussed how curators can contribute to sustainability during their everyday work. Mr. Fitski talked about the problem of air conditioning in exhibition rooms. He also questioned the frequent use of airplanes to dispatch couriers, for example, and he even questioned the idea of lending itself, suggesting instead that museums could perhaps utilize their own collections more. He also made several proposals about: sharing collections; re-using display cases and tools; undertaking joint enterprises through the use of online platforms; and constructing a database of collections. Furthermore, he gave several examples where it would be difficult to act in an environmentally responsible manner, noting how air travel was sometimes unavoidable for geographical and climate-related reasons, for instance, and how it was unfeasible to cut back on the use of air conditioning. Mr. Fitski also expressed the opinion that we needed to change the way we think about marketing exhibitions. He expressed concerns about this generation's over-use of fragile Japanese artworks, for example, and he questioned the practice of trying to attract visitors by constantly holding exhibitions of famous works loaned from other museums. He said museums needed to think more about how to tackle the issue of sustainability and he called for an ongoing debate between specialists in Japanese art with regards to what could be done and what should be done.

Presentation 3: The Courier Challenges Facing Small Museums and Galleries

Presenter: Shoichi Furukawa (Yamato Bunkakan):

Presentation overview

For small museums and art galleries like Mr. Furukawa's Yamato Bunkakan, despite an understanding that courier work is essential for the safe transportation of objects, there is resistance to the idea, for the three main reasons outlined below:

- ① There is uncertainty about procedures (import/export and CITES)
- ② There is apprehension that springs from a lack of experience
- ③ There is resistance to the idea of sending curators overseas to act as couriers for a time, as this will increase the day-to-day workload of curators who stay behind

Small museums want to cooperate as much as possible with loan requests from overseas museums and art galleries, but the courier issue often proves an impediment. One way to solve this would be for the National Museums and the Agency for Cultural Affairs to loan works and carry out procedures on behalf of smaller museums. However, if a loan request is not made directly made to the National Museums or the Agency for Cultural Affairs, the staff at these institutions cannot realistically be expected to cooperate when they are busy, so we need to think about how to reduce workloads.

Therefore, when planning exhibitions featuring objects borrowed from within Japan, it helps to consider

various factors during the planning or conception phase, such as whether the National Museums or the Agency for Cultural Affairs will play a coordinating role, for example, or whether this role will fall to smaller museums, with the lending museums providing couriers. A further factor to consider is the relations between lending museums within Japan (building an environment where curators in charge at each museum can consult each other freely). If these factors are considered and preparations made accordingly, this will facilitate lending by smaller museums who otherwise have little experience when it comes to couriers. At the end of the day, the main responsibility lies with the museums holding (planning) the exhibitions. For them, the key to a successful exhibition lies in building friendly relations with the people in charge at each institution through dialogue and the detailed exchange of information.

After the presentation, a participant said many find it hard to understand immediately why these cooperative relations were so important, but over time they gradually came to realize how important connections in Japan are when lending or borrowing objects. It was also pointed out that it might be more efficient from an operational perspective to gather objects from the various owners together in one place before dispatching them overseas, noting that this would also be a good idea from a sustainability standpoint. There was no reason under the museum system why couriers had to be curators. They said that the practice in Japan of always holding exhibitions of famous works was leading to more loans from overseas, adding that it would be advisable to eliminate the paper work involved in loaning works.

This was followed by a progress report on a database for Japanese art. There was also an explanation about how to use and register with the International Network for Japanese Art (INJA).