

Presentation 4

An unprecedented exploration of Japanese Art at the Exhibition, *Marcel Duchamp and Japanese Art*

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Profile

Masato Matsushima is involved with permanent and temporary exhibitions at Tokyo National Museum that relate to his research in the field of the History of Japanese Painting. He has curated *HASEGAWA TOHAKU: 400th Memorial Retrospective* (Tokyo National Museum, Kyoto National Museum, 2010), *Remaking Tradition: Modern Art of Japan from the Tokyo National Museum* (Cleveland Museum of Art, USA, 2014), *Kuniyoshi & Kunisada* (Bunkamura Museum, Kobe City Museum, Nagoya/Boston Museum of Fine Arts, 2016), and other exhibitions.

At the National Center for the Promotion of Cultural Properties he has been involved in planning interactive exhibitions such as *Diving into Screen Paintings: A New Way to Experience Japanese Art* (2017) and *TNM and Art Tunes! Present: Becoming Japanese Art* (2018), as well as reproducing artworks and making high-resolution video records of them.

Held from October 2 to December 9, 2018, *Marcel Duchamp and Japanese Art* (Fig. 1 and 2) was a collaborative exhibition project between the Tokyo National Museum (hereinafter 'TNM') and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The project comprised two exhibitions. The first was *The Essential Duchamp*, an international travelling exhibition planned and overseen by the Philadelphia Museum of Art. This introduced the creative activities of Duchamp by showcasing his works including over 150 oil paintings and 'readymade' objects from the Philadelphia Museum of Art's Duchamp collection. The second was *Rediscovering Japan through Duchamp*. This used items from TNM's collection to explore the meaning and aesthetic value of Japanese art, which was created within very different social conditions to those of the West, while proposing new ways of appreciating the beauty of this art.

The relation between TNM and the Philadelphia Museum of Art dates back to the Centennial International Exhibition, held in Philadelphia in 1876. TNM also helped with various works related to Japan's cultural properties when the Philadelphia Museum of Art organized exhibitions of Japanese art recently. It was against the backdrop of these ongoing relations that the Philadelphia Museum of Art proposed holding a Duchamp exhibition across Asia in 2018 to coincide with the 50th anniversary of Duchamp's passing, with TNM also formally approached about the idea. TNM does not usually hold exhibitions of 'modern art.' As such, TNM agreed to the proposal on the condition that any exhibition would also be held in conjunction with an exhibition of Japanese art. Since the Meiji era, the aesthetic values of Western art have formed the basis for the appreciation of Japanese art. However, we believed an exhibition tracing Duchamp's artistic footprints would first of all provide an opportunity to appreciate



Fig.1: A poster for the special exhibition *Marcel Duchamp and Japanese Art*.



Fig.2: A flyer for the special exhibition *Marcel Duchamp and Japanese Art*.

Japanese art in a new way. Speaking frankly, we believed an appreciation of Duchamp's work could help contextualize the conventional ways of looking at Japanese art nowadays. Hence the title to the second exhibition: *Rediscovering Japan through Duchamp*. The Philadelphia Museum of Art also agreed with our idea of holding a parallel exhibition of Japanese art, with Tokyo the only place to feature this two-exhibition format. Exhibition 1 (Fig. 3) was organized by Matthew Affron, a curator



Fig. 3: Exhibition 1 - *The Essential Duchamp*



Fig. 4: Exhibition 2 - *Rediscovering Japan through Duchamp*

at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, with TNM staff contributing ideas about the actual installations, floor designs and graphic designs, for example. In this way, the exhibition fused the curatorial ideas of our two museums. Mr. Affron's kind and thoroughgoing explanations contributed greatly to facilitating an understanding of Duchamp's art. We prepared chapter and exhibit explanations in Japanese, English, Chinese and Korean, with experts from both museums also conducting in-depth discussions about environmental conditions at the venue. Exhibition 2 (Fig. 4) examined how Japanese art was shaped by different social values from those that prevailed in the West. Through themes such as visual impacts, realism, and the passage of time, the exhibition aimed to provide visitors with new ways of appreciating Japanese art.

In recent years, many special exhibitions at TNM have been held in partnership with media companies; however, this exhibition was an exception, with TNM providing the funds itself, mainly through entrance fees and other self-generated funds. With support from the Terra Foundation for American Art, we also held lectures and other educational activities. Several companies also provided materials and equipment for the exhibits. The insurance costs were also lowered substantially thanks to the national indemnity program run by the Agency for Cultural Affairs.

This independence meant we could also try several new initiatives. For example, as both exhibitions only featured exhibits from our respective collections, we could permit photography throughout the entire venue, which resulted in numerous visitors posting about the exhibitions on social media. We also set up a bespoke website and Twitter account and produced exhibition mascots and goods, for example, and we posted videos featuring contemporary artists and creators up on SNS. Furthermore, rather than our usual audio guides, we tried to make the exhibits more enjoyable through our experimental 'Duchamp Ogiri' guide. As a result of these initiatives, we managed to attract many 20- to 30-year-olds, a demographic who were perhaps not particularly aware of Duchamp. As such, the exhibitions were very significant in terms of promoting an understanding of Duchamp's art in Japan. The exhibitions were also very well received among artists deeply influenced by Duchamp.

Over 80,000 people visited in the end, with the exhibitions providing a rare chance to encounter the voluminous Duchamp collection outside the grounds of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. By comparing these works to Japanese art, the exhibitions also encouraged people to 'think about' rather than just 'look at' art. I believe they served a valuable role in rousing the intellectual curiosity of many people.