When the project to create this volume was first conceived some years ago at the suggestion of Samuel Morse, it seemed difficult to imagine that there would soon be such a growth of interest, both among scholars and in the general public, in the arts of Japan in the twentieth century. When I first began my own research in this field in 1987, at the time I was helping to organize an exhibition titled *Paris in Japan*, there was virtually nothing written in English that could provide any extended analysis on the subject of modern Japanese painting or, indeed, on any of the other visual arts (always with the exception of prints, which have sustained a more or less continuous interest from collectors in the United States and Europe). Since that time, beginning with Alexandra Munroe’s catalogue on the postwar avant-garde, *Scream Against the Sky*, the exhibition of which was held in various locations in 1994 and 1995, and the catalogue compiled by Ellen Conant, myself, and others on the subject of modern Japanese-style painting (*Nihonga*), held at the St. Louis Museum of Art in 1995, a whole new group of younger scholars has now begun to examine one aspect or another of the remarkable explosion that characterizes virtually every area of the Japanese visual arts since the 1880s. Superior research outside Japan is now being undertaken not only in this country but elsewhere, as the writings of John Clark and Chiaki Ajioka in Australia, Toshio Watanabe in England, Michael Lucken in France, and Doris Croissant in Germany make clear.

Examined from our contemporary vantage point, this prior lack of interest may seem hard to understand, particularly given the long-standing scholarly and public interest in the Japanese arts of earlier periods. But there were, and to some extent still are, reasons for this relative neglect. To briefly explicate some of them here may help suggest some of the directions that future efforts in this field of study might undertake.

First of all (and as always, with the exception of prints), there have been very few works of Japanese art created during the first half of the twentieth century or even later that have found their way into the collections of American or European museums. With the exception, for example, of one significant painting of Leonard Foujita that can be seen in Chicago, and a number of his works in Paris and elsewhere in France, there are very few works of Japanese painting, sculpture, or calligraphy created between the late nineteenth century and the contemporary period that can actually be seen and studied firsthand. For any kind of extended viewing, a trip to Japan is necessary, and even then many museums with relevant holdings only place on display a small selection of them at any one time. It thus
comes as no surprise that art lovers with an interest in Japan may still remain virtually ignorant of the range and accomplishment of the Japanese visual arts during this period. Indeed, until recently, many history books on Japanese art ended with the coming of the Meiji period in 1868. Penelope Mason’s 1993 History of Japanese Art was the first study, to my knowledge, that attempted to integrate the modern period; even so, the author stops her analysis before World War II.

Secondly, Japanese documentation, and the scholarship that makes relevant data available to researchers outside Japan, was until relatively recently focused almost entirely on earlier periods of Japanese cultural and artistic history. In looking for serious works of scholarship in the Japanese language on Meiji and post-Meiji Japanese art, I was told by respected Japanese colleagues, even as late as the early 1980s, that modern art was not yet considered to be a proper scholarly subject and that the phenomenon was best left to be discussed by general cultural historians, critics, and journalists. The present generation of younger Japanese scholars, however, has proven that older premise a false one; Satō Dōshin and others, following in the steps of such precursors as Harada Minoru and Kawakita Michiaki (both scholars working at least partially in the museum world), have opened up this period to extended and serious inquiry, producing studies and documents that provide depth and resonance to our growing understanding of this rich period of creativity.

Thirdly, we need to examine how our own unexamined presumptions about what constitutes merit and creativity in the visual arts may color our judgment. It seems to me that up until at least the 1970s (when I was helping to prepare Paris in Japan), the general art-loving public in this country considered what is usually termed high modernism to be the most important contribution to the arts around the world in the postwar period. Judged by those austere standards, much twentieth-century Japanese painting and sculpture seemed overly derivative and seemed not to possess the kind of unique authenticity then deemed necessary for a contemporary work of art to be taken seriously. With the subsequent shift of attitudes into what is often termed the postmodern era, however, the challenge of using borrowed or shared ideas, and the creative possibilities to be found in observing a judicious, eclectic mixing of styles and themes, now seemed to take on genuine virtues of their own. Thus it now became increasingly possible for twentieth-century Japanese art to appear genuinely skillful and attractive to Western observers, ironically for many of the very reasons that hitherto had caused it to be ignored.

Finally, one can observe that in the first years of our present century, Japanese contemporary art has come to be considered very much a part of world art, and accepted as such. We, as spectators, are therefore at a different phase in our shifting potential appreciation and understanding of Japan’s contribution to the entire corpus of contemporary art around the world. Looking backwards in time from these present successes and the considerable international prestige of contemporary Japanese art, we can quite naturally become interested in understanding the historical process by which this present level of universally acknowledged accomplishment has been achieved. Thus those earlier works, created using imported Western styles and ideals as referents, created in the Meiji period and after can now be seen, and judged, as specific and successful examples of works that can be placed on a cultural and historical continuum, representing a visual manifestation of the process by which Japan came to join a larger world after such a long period of seclusion during the
preceding Tokugawa period. In that context, therefore, the beauty of, say, a work of sculpture by Ogiwara Morie, or a painting by Fujishima Takeji, can now be studied and placed on a more reasonable and sensible scale of merit. And, after all, when confronted with a Matisse, what American painter of that period could measure up? Yet we, as Americans, can deeply appreciate the angular experiments of, say, a Marsden Harley, just as the Japanese can genuinely enjoy the sensual colors and flair of an Umehara Ryūzaburō.

All the authors who contributed their enthusiasm and knowledge to the present volume have, each in his or her own way, helped to elucidate one or more elements that can eventually contribute to the future construction of a true history of Japanese art since Meiji. The moment to do so, however, at least looking from my vantage point as a cultural historian, has still not arrived.

In Dore Aston’s stimulating study About Rothko, she observes that as a painter, the American artist Mark Rothko refused to subscribe to any mechanical or theoretical schemes capable of reducing a work of art to the confines of a particular theoretical scheme. In that context, she cites Nietzsche, whose work had long interested the artist.

The will to system: in a philosophy, morally speaking, a subtle corruption, a disease of the character; morally speaking, his will to pose as more stupid than he is, more stupid, that means: stronger, simpler, more commanding, less educated, more masterful, more tyrannical.1

The desire to create a theoretical model into which the history of Japanese art since the beginning of the Meiji period in 1868 can be placed is understandable, yet at this point such a desire may well represent a “subtle corruption,” since any system would of necessity impose itself on a mass of complex historical and artistic facts, a relatively large number of which as yet remain too little researched and understood. The time to write that history may come, but before then, much more needs to be known. Working down from a larger theory or theories to the specific facts, and so to a unified interpretation, may, at some later time, come to be highly useful. But too many of those specifics remain elusive. If art historians knew as much about the arts of Japan during the last century as they do, say, about painting in France in the nineteenth century, or about the construction of cathedrals in medieval Europe, then the creation of larger theories that might encompass the Japanese visual arts since 1868 would seem an imperative. Yet, as those who read the essays in this collection will observe, there remains still too much crucial information as yet undiscovered, and too many central artistic figures to examine, to permit the creation of a general system of understanding at this time.

The only scholar known to me who has attempted to take on some of these larger questions in a responsible fashion is John Clark, in his ambitious 1998 Modern Asian Art, a study that, incidentally, provides a wealth of detail of great potential interest to readers interested in Japanese art since Meiji. Yet here as well, Clark spends considerable intellectual energy opening up a wide range of concerns and subjects but wisely demurs from offering any final word on them.
Those who contributed to this present volume were given no suggestions or instructions concerning what particular intellectual or theoretical framework they should use in approaching their individual topics. Few have set out to impose any larger design on their material. They are working from the bottom up.

Then, too, there are certain prior predispositions of mind and eye of which we, as Western viewers of this art, need to remain aware. Perhaps the most obvious of these is that we, by the very nature of our own history, culture, and personal backgrounds, must always remain, wittingly or unwittingly, comparatists. When we look, say, at a painting by Umehara Ryüzaburō, our response is shaped and colored by the fact that we have already in our visual repositories certain images of the paintings of Renoir and other European artists of the period with whom Umehara himself was quite familiar. Because of these prior dispositions, we must continually make a series of decisions as to how such already assimilated visual knowledge on our part can or should guide our response.

The Japanese response to the same work of art, depending on the period, may vary as well, depending on when the work was first visible to the public. In the 1920s, for example, a work of Umehara may have been startling; by 2000, Japanese art historians and the educated public alike had become able, through a vastly increased exposure to Western art, to make a more just assessment, from their point of view, of what the artist had accomplished.

The unfiltered use of Western art categories—“modernism,” “avant-garde,” “postmodern,” and other similar terms—when applied to the Japanese visual arts in this period must therefore also be subject to similar cautions. As Gennifer Weisenfeld suggests in her essay, while the Japanese often came to use such terms themselves, they used them to provide systems of negotiation within Japanese culture; their meanings and significance were established and understood in those particular contexts. No simple transfers of terminologies are appropriate or even truly possible. Therefore, in setting out to examine the possibilities of any yet-to-be-constructed master narrative of the developments of Japanese art since the beginning of the Meiji period, we must proceed by looking closely at the myriad, sometimes apparently conflicting, analyses available. With the opening of the country to the West in 1868, a whole stable of new artistic and cultural forces were let loose, and their deeper significance, both artistically and culturally, is only now becoming relatively clear after a period of well more than a hundred years.

These cautions may seem obvious. For scholars and viewers alike, it would seem apparent that any sense of Western centrality or cultural superiority, one way or the other, must be avoided. Yet the subtle temptation to fall back on our own unacknowledged perceptions is always there.

For those approaching the subject of late nineteenth- and twentieth-century Japanese art for the first time, a few historical matters may be useful to keep in mind. A number of these points are well explicated in the individual essays that follow, but it might be well to mention some of them now. Here are four.

In the first place, Japanese culture has always been, at least in some respects, cosmopolitan. With the coming of Buddhism to Japan in around the sixth century, Chinese culture
(either transmitted directly or via Korea) became a reference point for sophisticated Japanese. Continental forms of architecture had arrived in Japan by the Hakuhō and Nara periods (646–794 CE). Chinese poetry and painting, as it became increasingly better known and appreciated, began to suggest new avenues of expression from indigenous artists. By the Heian period (794–1185 CE), the works of literature and art created, it might be argued, were genuinely Japanese, while still paying a certain homage to continental sources.

The fascination with other cultures and the desire to incorporate new motifs and ideas continued on through all subsequent periods. By the time of the Tokugawa shoguns in the 1600s and after, there was, in addition to the continuing interest in China, a certain tentative knowledge of Western art and literature, examples of which had arrived in Japan during the preceding century through the efforts of Portuguese traders and Catholic missionaries; these contacts, of course, were reduced when the country was closed off in the 1630s. Chinese art and literature continued to provide the dominant comparative perspective until the latter half of the nineteenth century.

The opening of Japan to the West in 1868 and the decision made by those governing the country to come to terms with Western culture meant that, slowly but surely, the axis of interest would turn from China to Europe (and, particularly after the Pacific War, to America). That shift represents the first of the changes that came to Japanese culture in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

A second shift came about because, after the fall of the Shogunate, the establishment of a parliament, politics, and the possibilities for some participation by ordinary citizens in civic life came to represent enduring factors in the development of so many aspects of Japanese culture. The possibility of political and cultural choices allowed for alternative choices, which in turn led to competing loyalties and commitments in every field of endeavor, including the arts. Dramas with political content were now seen on the stage, and competing beliefs about the purposes and opportunities for the visual arts eventually led to a wide range of diversely committed styles, which ranged from paintings and prints that drew on what were now considered “classical” themes drawn from earlier Chinese and Japanese models to works drawing their inspiration from a wide range of Western sources, ranging from French Impressionism to European proletarian art.

This burgeoning desire among many artists and intellectuals to join a larger cultural and intellectual world produced another significant set of fresh divisions in Japanese culture. After being cut off for virtually two centuries from significant artistic contact with the West, Japanese writers and artists now came to embrace new ideas from Europe that, had the country remained open to the currents of world culture (as Japan had been before the early seventeenth century), would have been introduced slowly and with a certain circumspection, as had Chinese conceptions in earlier times. But this new explosion seems to have quickly produced what seems in retrospect to have been a kind of schizophrenic division in the arts. In literature, for example, some writers, even now, continue to write poetry in the traditional forms—thirty-one-syllable waka and seventeen-syllable haiku. Others, inspired by the example of such Western poets as Goethe, Baudelaire, and Edgar Allan Poe, began by the end of the nineteenth century to compose long poems in Japanese. (Long poems were composed by Japanese authors in earlier periods, but the linguistic medium employed was generally classical Chinese.) In the theater, some writers continued to compose for the Kabuki stage while others modeled a new kind of spoken drama based
on the examples of Chekhov and Ibsen. And in painting, certain artists chose to continue to retain certain traditional techniques in the development of a neoclassical Nihonga tradition, while others adopted oil painting techniques from Europe to create fresh styles in a new medium. These two parallel tracks and traditions of creativity were to continue until well after the Pacific War, when such distinctions gradually grew less significant. These kinds of parallel artistic universes suggest that even though Japan (unlike most of the rest of Asia in the late nineteenth century) was not colonized, her artistic responses to the rapid shifts imposed by the West on her larger cultural and political spheres were mirrored in a series of sometimes contradictory responses that often resembled those of Asian countries directly colonized by Europeans.

Indeed, in the Japanese case, even those works of art created with classical principles in mind nevertheless revealed the growing presence of powerful influences from the Western example. In that sense, the Japanese visual arts gradually became part of a larger world, whether that world was willingly embraced or even partially rejected. The ground had shifted.

Another set of changes, mentioned in one way or another by several of the contributors to this volume, involves shifts in patronage. In the early nineteenth century, many artists generally derived their financial support from a variety of sources, from wealthy daimyō and other local and national figures of authority to the larger print-buying public. With the collapse of the Shogunate came the rise of a new political class, now made up of gifted former samurai and commoners who had little prior contact with the arts patronized by the court, the aristocracy, or other important figures. Prior sources of support came to be replaced, at least in some cases, by the state, as well as by powerful merchants and others who rose financially in the new society. An interest in the arts was soon to become an indispensable part of what might be expected of citizens of the new middle class. Museums, art exhibitions, galleries, and a whole host of new kinds of organizations arose to provide the structures necessary to sustain the creation of contemporary Japanese visual arts.

Finally, there was also a measurable shift in the self-image among many of those who created these works of art. Although all generalizations are dangerous, it can be remarked that until the 1870s many professional artists looked at themselves as part of a group or school, and they took their reputation and their fame, if such developed, from their participation in that group. Again, this system began to loosen with shifts in patronage, and artists began to conceive of themselves more as individual creators, with their own particular visions to explore.

Several of the chapters in this volume note the seminal importance and influence of an essay written in 1910 by the gifted sculptor and poet Takamura Kōtarō (1883–1956), titled “The Green Sun,” in which he expressed his conviction that the artist’s highest duty was to pursue a personal vision, and furthermore that spectators must grant the artist that privilege. Takamura’s essay remained influential, perhaps in particular because he studied both in the United States and in France with Rodin. Yet such attitudes were already in the air among artistic circles even before the turn of the twentieth century, and the concept of the “artist”—whether poet, architect, painter, novelist, or dramatist—was to become increasingly central.
If at least in my view, no definitive history of the visual arts in this period can at this point yet be created, it is also true that a number of central issues can be identified that can help in turn suggest the larger significance of the myriad of artistic activities undertaken as the generations continued. Perhaps rather than defining these “issues” as such, it might be more useful to cast them in terms of polarities, confluences of views and attitudes that continued to shift back and forth, sometimes taking first one direction, then another. These related and interlocking polarities, or sets of dynamics, of which I here identify four, have continued to function within a larger framework, one that in turn served to provide meaning and significance to many of the various individual movements.

The first and most important of these, it seems to me, is the polarity expressed in the tension between the national and the international. These shifting attitudes are closely connected to social and political events as well. The pull toward nationalism, and the search for some “essence” of Japanese culture, became prevalent in times of tension and in particular in times of war. Such tendencies can be observed late in the nineteenth century. When, for example, after a first powerful flush of interest in the visual arts of Europe, a growing understanding by the political elite of the political situation in Japan during the period when most of her neighbors were becoming colonized by the Western powers may have helped cause a countermovement, an effort to pull back from an indiscriminate urge for Westernization. In the case of the visual arts, this tendency can be seen most notably, as several authors in this volume point out, in the closing in 1883 of the Technical Art School (Kōbu Bijutsu Gakkō), founded in 1876, less than a decade after the beginning of the Meiji period, which offered government-sponsored training in the techniques of Western painting and sculpture. As Japan’s government achieved its goal of convincing Western nations that she was a modern country worthy of respect, notably through Japan’s victories in the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), renewed overtures toward absorbing relevant developments in the European arts began to come to the fore again, an enthusiasm that was only dampened as the war with China began in earnest beginning in the early 1930s. The war years brought in turn a surge of nationalism, which was again soon set aside in the postwar years. Yet even now, in the political sphere at least, such attitudes continue to show an occasional tendency to reassert themselves as Japan continues to puzzle over its role in the larger contemporary world.

Allied to this is a related phenomenon, which can be observed in so many aspects of the Japanese arts, that involves a felt need to seek approbation overseas in order to secure validation for a work of art within Japan itself. Perhaps the most widely known example of this tendency concerns the now famous film of Kurosawa Akira, his 1950 film Rashōmon. The film received little attention in Japan until it won the coveted Golden Lion award at the Venice Film Festival in 1951, which catapulted the film and its director to fame in Japan. There are a number of occasions in history of the visual arts in postwar Japan, notably in architecture and avant-garde art, where foreign approbation has quickly spurred domestic success.

A second tendency, also related to the first, concerns a growing self-consciousness by artists and the public alike concerning the older traditions of Japanese art, allied to a fresh quest to understand to what extent these forms and traditions might continue to show relevance in changing times. As noted above, some artists consciously set out to remake (but by no means abandon) older traditions, in creating works in the Nihonga
tradition, while others vigorously opposed this tendency. And it can certainly be observed that an exposure to the work and ideals of such figures as William Morris and others in the English Arts and Crafts movement by Japanese artists and intellectuals brought about a virtual revolution in an understanding of the role and artistic value of the crafts of pre-Meiji Japan. Lacquer, pottery, fabrics, basketry, and many other similar art forms carried on by artisans through the centuries now seemed to reveal a real beauty and significance that remained largely outside the purview of “art” until a growing sense of the need seen by Japanese intellectuals to define the contours of a national tradition. The concept of what might constitute Japanese art, and therefore Japanese tradition, was therefore changed and enlarged.

A growing historical consciousness of the importance to the Japanese tradition of religious art, notably in the areas of sculpture and architecture, also became apparent. Buddhist art, and religious sculpture in particular, now seemed to represent an important element in defining the high level of artistic accomplishments sustained in earlier periods. Yet by the end of the Tokugawa period, ironically, far less religious art was produced that could be regarded as truly spiritual or artistically arresting. Since 1868, however, a number of attempts, some successful, have been undertaken to create images of religious significance that could nevertheless be appreciated as works of art in terms of Japanese contemporary taste, itself by now increasingly formed by exposure to international currents. Certain Buddhist themes remained important at the turn of the twentieth century, both in the Nihonga tradition (fig. 1.1) and yōga traditions (see fig. 10.1) as well as in the work of such monk-artists as Nantembō Tōjū (1839–1925) (fig. 1.2), and a number of print artists as well (fig. 1.3). Many of these images still resonate with both the Japanese and the international public.

Figure I.1. Hishida Shunsō, *Smile to a Flower*, 1897. Color on silk, 57 ¼ × 107 ¼ inches. Tokyo National Museum.
Figure I.2. Nantembō Tōjū, *Procession of Monks*, 1924. Ink on paper, each 51 × 113 ¾ inches. Man’yō-an Collection.
Figure I.3. Munakata Shikō, *The Buddhist Disciple Subodai*, 1939. 1023 mm × 396 mm. Private collection.
A third set of shifting priorities during this period involves a complex set of exchanges whereby Japanese visual artists readily accepted information and inspiration from abroad while at the same time providing both training and inspiration concerning the practice of the arts in contemporary Japan to other countries and cultures, in both Asia and the West. Again, using a spectrum based on the past 120 years or so, it might be observed that during the earlier part of this period, Japanese artists and the intelligentsia were receiving more information, and a wider variety of stimuli, concerning European art than they were providing to artists and intellectuals in other countries in return. (Of course it should be noted that older forms of Japanese art, notably woodblock prints, became well known and highly influential in helping such artists as Manet, Monet, Van Gogh, and others achieve a new sense of direction in their own creative work.)

Specifically, it can be pointed out that while, for example, Japanese painters and printmakers were inspired by their fresh exposure to examples of Western art, the work of these same artists often served as models that could help create movements toward a fresh contemporary art in many other countries in Asia. At the same time—the end of the nineteenth century—artists in those countries sought to bring their own work into the same international sphere in which the Japanese were already beginning to find success as they mastered new techniques. Aspiring artists in the Japanese colonies (Korea and Taiwan) benefited from the establishment by Japan's colonial governments of indigenous national exhibitions and academies like those in Japan, where the techniques of contemporary 藝術 and 華人は were taught, either by Japanese instructors or those trained by them. ² Well-known and respected Japanese artists were often sent as judges for such exhibitions. In addition, many young artists from Asian countries made the trip to Tokyo and Kyoto to pursue their studies. The Korean painter O Chi-ho (1905–1982), for instance, studied with Fujishima Takeji at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts and returned to Korea to create a fresh style of Korean landscape painting (fig. 1.4). The artist Li Meishu (1902–1983), after some early training in Taiwan, studied with Okada Saburōsuke at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts and on his return was soon winning prizes in Taipei (fig. 1.5).

A more thorough study of details of this complex process of exchange, which also involved during various periods such areas as Manchuria, China, Vietnam, and even Indonesia, is now being undertaken by scholars in various countries. As they trace the development of an international style in the context of their own individual artistic traditions, the role of Japan's importance to the development of the visual arts in Asia for the last hundred years or more will become even more apparent. China had served as the inspiration for artists in Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and other civilizations until the mid-nineteenth century; since then, and increasingly, Japan became the conduit through which currents of contemporary art around the world reached artists in much of the rest of Asia.

In general terms, it can probably be said that Japan's artists began to have a noticeable effect on their Western counterparts from the 1950s or 1960s onwards.³ By 2000, a painter such as Murakami Takashi (born 1962) had achieved worldwide fame, and it was a Japanese architect, Taniguchi Yoshio (born 1937), who was chosen to design the new building in Manhattan for the Museum of Modern Art. Fifty years before, no one could have imagined what we now take for granted. Watching this flow of inspiration and knowledge shift
Figure I.4. O Chi-ho, *A House Facing the South*, 1939. Oil on canvas. 79 cm × 91 cm. National Museum of Contemporary Art, Keach’on.

Figure I.5. Li Meishu, *Girl at Rest*, 1935. 162 × 130 cm. Collection of the artist’s family.
back and forth during these decades represents still another way to chart the historical shifts, and growing influence, of the Japanese visual arts since Meiji.

A fourth dynamic that can be observed during this period concerns the development of an ever more receptive audience in Japan for various kinds of Japanese art created during this period. At the beginning of the Meiji era, the kinds of class distinctions so important in Tokugawa culture were still largely in place. Popular art, notably certain crafts and woodblock prints, were appreciated by ordinary citizens, particularly in such urban areas as Edo and Osaka, while the important schools and styles of painting at the time—Kano, Tosa, the literati style, etc.—were highly valued by connoisseurs and patrons but were not generally available for viewing and study by any larger public. By the middle of the Meiji period, however, a number of changes, many based on a new grasp of European precedents, helped to develop potentials for a broader audience. In the late nineteenth century, national museums created in Nara, Kyoto, and Tokyo through the efforts of political and cultural leaders, built on the European model, helped create a sense that a superior national artistic patrimony did exist, as well as confirming convictions by government officials that examples of this patrimony should be made available to the population at large. These institutions helped work a profound transformation in the thinking of the growing middle-class Japanese public as to the significance of the visual arts in helping give significance to various aspects of the national culture.

On the other hand, these museums did little to promote the contemporary Japanese visual arts, a role largely left to galleries, a few private museums, and exhibitions held in large gallery spaces in department stores and the like. These venues, however, were widely attractive and often influential in shaping public taste.

The growth in the availability of education, and the increasing urbanization of the population, coincided with the development of a popular press; well before the end of the nineteenth century, newspapers, magazines, and journals became more widely available, and frequent writing on the visual arts made it possible for the work of an artist or an architect to be increasingly known and more widely appreciated. And while it might be said that many of the journalists who first wrote on Japanese contemporary visual arts had little background or training, as Mikiko Hirayama points out in her chapter, there soon developed a coterie of spokespersons with more and more of the requisite background and prestige to serve as tastemakers for their readers.

The Japanese government, however, was not indifferent to the importance of contemporary Japanese art. By setting up a national exhibition system under the sponsorship of the Ministry of Education, titled the Mombusho Bijutsu Tenrankai (usually referred to as Bunten), a conception based on the example of the famous French yearly Salon, officials allowed for a range of contemporary art to be widely viewed and judged. The first Bunten exhibition was held in 1907. Those artists who did not subscribe to the rules laid down for Bunten would often go on, as did French artists in their Salon des refusés, to set up independent groups that, through publicity in the press, could also make their mark with the general public. And a growing fascination for the visual arts, at least in the urban areas, quickly became apparent. According to the statistics, more than 161,000 persons visited the 1912 Bunten, a remarkable change from less than fifty years before, when there were no extensive public exhibitions held at all. Continuations and new variations on these organizations carry on even today, and they continue to attract large and appreciative audiences.
And this ever-growing public for Japanese visual arts was of critical importance during this whole period, since such a sustained enthusiasm on the part of the public ensured that these various art forms—painting, sculpture, printmaking, and so forth—would continue to be practiced with vigor.

It might be argued, based on the observations mentioned above, that the historical outlines of Japanese art since Meiji have indeed been well understood. I would hasten to point out, however, that much research is still to be undertaken, certainly among scholars outside of Japan.

I might point out, for example, that there do not yet exist in English sufficient studies in depth of important individual artists, with a few highly useful exceptions. Suppose, for example, that in American art, we had no studies of, say, Winslow Homer, Edward Hopper, Jackson Pollock, or Mark Rothko. How might it be possible to construct a larger view of American art without studies of this kind to use as building blocks to make it possible to ground theoretical arguments in the specific accomplishments of the period? And while there are adequate illustrated descriptive treatments in the Japanese language of individual artists, there are, to best of my knowledge, few if any in either English or Japanese that contain thorough analytical studies of their works. Nor does there yet exist in Japanese, as far as I know, a published true catalogue raisonné for any of the major figures of the period. Assuredly some, if not most, of these efforts must be undertaken by Japanese scholars, who have access to materials hard to come by outside of Japan. Yet to the best of my knowledge, these studies have not yet been accomplished. So perhaps it is not so surprising in the end that that the articulation of any kind of authentic intertwining relationship between general theory and specific example remains difficult to manage.

Then, too, there are whole areas of inquiry that still need to be opened up for examination in order to construct such a history. I notice, for example, in looking over the research that has been done on postwar Japanese art, that a number of probing treatments of Japanese avant-garde painting, photography, sculpture, etc., have been published, yet there is very little available, at least in English, that can document in any relevant depth the more mainstream efforts of artists during the same period. Yōga, Nihonga, and representative sculpture did not vanish after 1950; indeed, as Burt Winther-Tamaki suggests, a number of major figures during the postwar period call for extended treatment to gain a fuller picture of the range of artistic accomplishment during the five or six decades involved.

The essays that make up this volume, therefore, can best be seen as first probes into the visual arts created during these complex social, political, and artistic decades. They may not provide the last word on their respective subjects, but they open up, in one area after another, a new possibility for readers outside Japan to find, in one volume, a sense of the excitement generated as the Japanese arts found their way into a wider world, as well as some indication of the wide range of artistic expression that followed.
Notes


2. For details on Asian artists involved with Japan during the colonial period, see essays in Marlene J. Mayo, J. Thomas Rimer, and H. Eleanor Kerkham, eds., War, Occupation, and Creativity: Japan and East Asia 1920–1960 (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2001).

3. This change occurred with the rise of what Reiko Tomii has identified as “international contemporaneity” in the 1960s, a phenomenon that can be observed in other areas as well, notably in drama written during the same period. See her compelling article “‘International Contemporaneity’ in the 1960s: Discoursing on Art in Japan and Beyond,” Nichibunken Japan Review 21 (2009): pp. 123–147.