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Winther-Tamaki/Maximum Embodiment

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INTRODUCTION

YŌGA, THE INTERCULTURAL ART OF EMBODIMENT AND DISEMBODIMENT

In one of his last films, the celebrated director Kurosawa Akira, who started his career in the 1920s as a Yōga-ka, or “Western painter,” created a poignant expression of Japanese yearning for Western painting in a segment called “Crows.”¹ An anonymous young Japanese painter peers longingly at a group of paintings by Vincent van Gogh in a museum and transports himself into the French countryside by means of a hallucinatory opening up of the pictorial space of van Gogh’s oil on canvas *Bridge of Arles*. Inspired, he sets out, canvas and paint box under his arm, on a quest to find the legendary painter. At length, he locates van Gogh standing alone in a field, painting furiously, but the European painter rebuffs his Japanese admirer: “The sun! It compels me to paint. I can’t stand here wasting my time talking to you.” Undeterred by the master’s indifference and energized by his passion, the Japanese painter sets off again to reconnect with van Gogh, losing himself among landscape forms that bear the unmistakable trace of van Gogh’s celebrated touch (figure I.1). He rushes through an increasingly surreal topography of oddly magnified coruscating van Gogh brushstrokes and finally catches one last view of van Gogh, disappearing off into a wheat field beneath a sky of menacing crows. This filmed landscape then congeals into the painting *Crows over the Wheatfield*, reputedly the tormented artist’s final work before his suicide. At this point, the Japanese artist finds himself suddenly back in the museum, gazing at the painting. He removes his cap in reverence for the genius transubstantiated into oil on canvas.

Kurosawa’s rendition in film of his own youthful dreamed encounter with van Gogh is a vivid cameo of the larger painting movement of which he had been a part. Many of Japan’s most prominent artists and thousands



FIGURE 1.1. Still from “Crows,” segment from *Dreams*, directed by Kurosawa Akira, 1990. Akira Kurosawa’s *Dreams* © Warner Bros. Inc. All Rights Reserved.

of less-known painters in the early and middle years of the twentieth century dedicated their careers to the pursuit of “Western painting.” This, at least, is the literal translation of “Yōga,” which was and continues to be the most common term for one of the most influential and prestigious movements in twentieth-century Japanese art. This term is hardly a misnomer, for throughout the period when the discourse and practice of Yōga were powerful mainstream forces in contemporary Japanese painting—arguably, from the 1890s through the 1950s—the movement embraced, in varying degrees, the materials, techniques, motifs, canons, and ideals of European painting. Yet, as van Gogh’s indifference to the Japanese painter in Kurosawa’s film intimates, a disturbing sense of alienation was also endemic to the pursuit of Yōga, and this alienation fueled strategies of expressing Japanese indigeneity within the formats, materials, and institutions of “Western painting.”

Any rubric so sweeping as “Western painting” points to multiple and competing sites of interest, knowledge, and historical change, but Yōga painters characteristically focused their creative attention on some new, old, or eclectic vision of painting in Europe that they regarded as synecdochic of

the West (*seiyō*). Yōga was one dimension of a broad pattern of Westernization or mimicry of Euramerican culture that is a well-known feature of modern Japanese history. Indeed, Yōga functioned as a medium of desire for “the West” in a period when this term signified the world’s greatest powers and their collective cultural heritage. Nevertheless, scholars have yet to satisfactorily answer the question, what motivated devotion to Western painting of the intensity conveyed by Kurosawa’s pilgrimage to the art of van Gogh? For the Yōga movement was a form of institutionalized devotion to a foreign medium that persisted even through years of war, when public discourse gave voice to heated nationalism, imperialism, and fascism, not to mention anti-Western rhetoric. To be sure, the bodily entry of Kurosawa’s painter into a dreamscape of van Gogh’s brushwork is a peculiar and extreme mode of artistic appreciation. Yet, as we shall see, early-twentieth-century Yōga painters did indeed construct self-portraits out of van Gogh’s brushstrokes and make pilgrimages to his tomb site in the French countryside. Numerous Japanese painters made the long ship journey to Paris and other European capitals and passionately pursued dreams of Western art in European schools, ateliers, museums, and rural landscapes. Still more artists and aspiring artists, like the young Kurosawa Akira, lacking the means to travel to Europe, absorbed the ideals and techniques of Western painting in Japanese schools and private workshops and by consuming Japanese-language technical manuals, journals, catalogues, and art history books. This study examines what Japanese painters desired and obtained from European painting, how they reconfigured it to suit their own needs, and the obstacles they encountered in this endeavor.

ANTECEDENTS AND BEGINNINGS

The period that is the focus of this book, namely, the 1910s through the 1950s, was a late phase in a much longer history of Japanese encounters with European painting. Yet Yōga was still typically regarded as a recent “transplant” from Europe. For example, the Yōga painter Koide Narashige, discussed in Chapter 2, despaired that Yōga was like a cut flower without roots and therefore destined to wither before it could grow in Japanese soil.² Although similar claims that twentieth-century Yōga had no “roots” in Japanese cultural history were repeated by numerous Japanese as well as foreign critics of Yōga, this view discounts a considerable earlier history of Japanese engage-

ments with European painting. In fact, the earlier reaches of this genealogy predate the development of that seemingly unimpeachable symbol of Japanese aesthetic identity, the ukiyo-e woodblock print. This section provides a brief overview of the history of Japanese ventures in the practice of European painting before the period that is the focus of this book. Four major phases can be identified in the early history of Japanese practices of European painting: Jesuit painting in the sixteenth century; “Dutch painting” (Ranga) in the eighteenth century; academic naturalism in the 1870s; and, finally, academic institutionalization and the emergence of a bohemian sensibility in the 1890s.³

Japanese Christian painting was both a fundamental instrument and remarkable consequence of the Jesuit missionary work in late-sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century Japan. In the 1590s, Jesuit missionaries established an art academy to teach Japanese converts how to paint Christian icons in the lifelike idiom of late Renaissance and early Baroque naturalism. This style appealed with a sense of emotional empathy to potential converts through the use of shading, foreshortening, perspective, and rich chromatism. The Jesuit academy in Japan became the largest Christian art school in Asia, and its Japanese pupils impressed their European teachers with astonishing skill in copying Christian images imported from Europe. Indeed, the Japanese painting academy became a supplier of Christian images to churches and confraternities in Japan, China, and India.⁴ Moreover, Japanese Jesuit painters who were trained in this academy proceeded to paint and teach in other locations in Japan as well as China and even the Philippines. At the time of this auspicious start of European painting in sixteenth-century Japan, Jesuits and other Europeans also transmitted the same Christian iconography, painting style, and techniques to New Spain (Mexico) and other parts of the world. In fact, the illustrious subsequent history of Christian art in Viceregal Mexico suggests the potential that European painting could have fulfilled in Japan were it not for the pogroms that extinguished Japanese Christianity in the early seventeenth century. Awareness of this impressive record of Japanese Christian art prior to its suppression in the seventeenth century and recognition that the cessation of this development was due to political causes rather than some presumed racial incompatibility deflate the contentions of twentieth-century critics of Yōga who sought to marginalize Yōga from an essentialistic Japanese sensibility.

The suppression of Christianity and ouster of the Jesuits from Japan by the Tokugawa Shogunate in the early seventeenth century succeeded in cutting off Japanese concourse with European painting, but only for a time.

In comparison with the notable attainment of Japanese Christian painting in the sixteenth century, the second major Japanese engagement with European painting seems rarely to have exceeded the struggle to grasp basic techniques. There was a wide dispersal of various permutations of the “Western scientific gaze” in late-eighteenth-century Japanese visual culture, but its products would probably have impressed Europeans less for their proficiency than for the eccentricity of the transformation.⁵ Japanese attempts in this period to fathom European painting are known as “Ranga,” or Dutch painting, as the Netherlands was the single European nation with which the Tokugawa permitted commerce, circumscribed though it was by strict regulations. Despite the constraints of poor access to European materials, models, and texts, the indefatigable proponents of Ranga, such as Shiba Kōkan, went to extraordinary lengths to learn perspective, anatomy, and techniques of producing oil paint pigments.

The establishment of the Technical Art School (Kōbu Bijutsu Gakkō) in Tokyo in 1876 marks the third phase of Japanese investigations of European painting. Efforts had been made by the late Tokugawa government to attain expertise in Western techniques of representation, but this school represents the first initiative by a Japanese governmental body to sponsor the systematic acquisition and dissemination of the skills, materials, and requisite knowledge of European painting. The school was chartered to “supplement the shortcomings of Japanese art and attain the same level as excellent European art schools by teaching new realistic methods.”⁶ Several highly accredited Italian artists were hired and brought to Tokyo to train a cadre of young Japanese professionals. This enterprise was motivated by the desire to strengthen the nation: European painting was sought not for artistic expression, but as the pragmatic acquisition of an applied technology alongside other instrumental necessities of the modern nation-state such as civil engineering, mechanics, telegraph technology, mining, chemistry, and metallurgy.⁷

But the products of Meiji policies of Westernization in the Technical Art School and elsewhere far exceeded culturally neutral instrumentality. Doubts emerged about excessive adoption of European culture, leading to a nativist critique of European painting in the 1880s and efforts for ensuring the perpetuation of pre-Meiji Japanese painting styles and techniques. This threat to the emerging role of European painting in modern Japanese visual culture was dramatically reversed with the return of the painter Kuroda Seiki (1866–1924) to Tokyo in 1893, after nearly a decade of study in France. Kuroda’s leadership in the Japanese art world in the 1890s through 1910s de-

finishes the fourth phase of Japanese appropriations of European painting. This artist's lengthy preparation in Paris as well as his family connections to the highest echelons of the Meiji government positioned him to play an unparalleled role in shaping modern Japanese painting. Kuroda has been referred to as the "father of modern Yōga" (*kindai Yōga no chichi*) for the impact of his work as painter, teacher, and administrator in establishing the institutions, canons, pedagogies, and ideals of Yōga.⁸ Among his most influential accomplishments, in 1898 Kuroda founded and assumed the directorship of the Western Painting department (Seiyōga-ka) at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts (Tōkyō Bijutsu Gakkō), which has served in effect as Japan's national art academy from 1893 to the present day. But together with his leading role in the institutionalization of Yōga as Japanese establishment art, Kuroda was also influential in the transfer of bohemian yearnings for freedom of expression, libertarian impulses, and erotic imagery from the Parisian art world to Japanese Yōga practice. Thus, while the Yōga movement that developed in the late Meiji period was the successor to earlier Japanese appropriations of European painting, it is distinguished from these precedents by its status as an official establishment media as well as by its bohemian sensibilities.

"YŌGA," THE WORD

Terms for modern art movements—Impressionism, Fauvism, Abstract Expressionism—are at best imperfect guides to the artists and works of art they denominate, and frequently they have been derided by art historians as misnomers. Similarly, the term "Yōga" is hardly an adequate key to understanding the vast and varied corpus of works painted by artists who were routinely classified as Yōga painters. Nevertheless, even those who might doubt the art historical utility of the term "Yōga" would surely agree that the fact that this term was used, contentedly or otherwise, by most of the protagonists of the painting so designated is of considerable significance. This term meaning "Western painting" identified the life's work of many of Japan's most accomplished artists and their followers in several generations with a foreign culture. Still, the connotations of the term "Yōga" were by no means unchanging. Here I offer a brief account of the "career" of the word "Yōga" to afford a general view of basic shifts in conceptions of Western painting that delineate the contours of the Yōga movement and its institutional history.⁹

In the late 1850s, the term “Ranga” was replaced by the term “Yōga,” reflecting an expansion of the Japanese awareness of the West beyond its previous focus on the Dutch. In the early Meiji period, however, words that referenced a material such as “oil painting” (*abura-e*) were much more common than words such as “Western painting” (Yōga) that referenced a cultural entity like “the West.” This initial emphasis on the material of oil painting reflected Japanese awareness of the exalted status of oil on canvas in European academic practice, the striking contrast posed by oil paint pigments to the water-soluble pigments of pre-Meiji Japanese painting, and the belief that oil painting was a superior technology for accurate representation of the visual world. Nevertheless, by the 1880s, an increasing preoccupation with the Westernness of this type of painting precipitated a shift from the term *abura-e* (oil painting) to *seiyōga* (Western painting), which was often used interchangeably with its abbreviation, “Yōga.”

Seiyōga also functioned in opposition to “Nihonga” (Japanese painting), which designated contemporary and pre-Meiji practices of presumably indigenous Japanese painting. A sense of two competing schools of painting arose in the 1880s, leading one critic to ask: “Will a splendid and refined Nihonga have sufficient worth in the future to attract supporters and compete with *seiyōga* or not?”¹⁰ These terms became institutionalized as names of the primary categories of contemporary Japanese painting practice, particularly by the establishment of separate submission categories for “Nihonga” and “Seiyōga” in the government-sponsored salon, which was founded in 1907. This salon became a major form of public entertainment attracting a huge annual audience averaging 200,000 people in the middle Taishō years.¹¹ With Japanese imperial expansion, the salon was replicated by Japanese colonial bureaucrats in Korea (1922), Taiwan (1927), and Manchuria (1938). Thus, the establishment of *seiyōga* as state-sponsored fine art in Japan spawned analogous institutionalizations elsewhere in Asia of “Western painting,” similarly rendered in Korean as *soyang-hwa* and Chinese as *xiyanghua*.

Yōga overtook Nihonga in the mid-1920s in terms of the number of paintings submitted by aspiring artists to the jury of the salon in Japan. Thus, in 1929, the Seiyōga division jurors screened 4,458 entries, which was over twice the number received by the Nihonga division.¹² Moreover, similar or greater numbers of Yōga paintings were submitted in these years to several private artist exhibition organizations, including the Second Section Society (Nikakai), founded in 1914 in secession from the government salon as a forum for Yōga artists sympathetic to more progressive tendencies in Eu-

ropean painting. In the early Shōwa period, acceptance in such exhibitions was seen as critical to the career success of the Yōga painter, but the odds of being accepted were very low because of the high number of contestants. Cutthroat competition drove aspiring artists to pore over every detail of paintings by Yōga artists who served as jurors or whose works had previously been accepted for exhibition in search of clues for devising winning entries of their own.¹³ Thus, although the acceptance of a still life painting by Kurosawa Akira for exhibition at the Second Section Society in 1927 would have been a minor triumph for an aspiring Yōga painter, the young Kurosawa's fateful switch to the medium of film was driven by disillusionment with his prospects for a successful career as a Yōga painter.¹⁴

Discontent with the bifurcation of contemporary Japanese painting into Yōga and Nihonga was voiced periodically throughout the development of Yōga, but this polarization was alleviated somewhat in the early Shōwa period, when a significant number of Yōga and Nihonga painters contributed to a revival of eighteenth-century Sino-Japanese ink-and-brush painting. Although the presumed recentness of the arrival of Yōga from Europe was an ongoing anxiety, a new awareness of the considerable efforts of Japanese artists of modern times was triggered by the death of the Taishō emperor and the end of his fourteen-year reign (1912–1926). As Omuka Toshiharu has demonstrated, this event led to a spate of exhibitions and books focused on Japanese art of the nearly six decades (1868–1926) comprising the combined reigns of the Taishō emperor and his father, the Meiji emperor. This retrospective stock-taking of the lineage of works and artists that was now canonized as “Meiji-Taishō art” and, indeed, “modern Japanese art history” created a native foundation for the further development of Yōga and other contemporary Japanese art forms.¹⁵ Starting in the late 1930s, Yōga and Nihonga became associated with dramatically different approaches to the affirmation and glorification of the nation's military mission in the second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945) and the Pacific War (1941–1945). Yōga was preferred for propagandistic scenes of heroic Japanese soldiers in battle, while Nihonga tended toward dreamy evocations of Japanese nature, spirit, and history. Regarded as a critical component of the war effort, Yōga war painting became a special beneficiary of the patronage of the bureaucracies of the Imperial Army and Navy.

It was not until after the war that Euramerican and Japanese practices of “Western painting” were clearly distinguished by separate terms; *seiyōga* was reserved for the former and “Yōga” for the latter. Subsequently, the con-

temporary practice of painting started to shed the term “Yōga” in favor of a return to “oil painting” (*abura-e*). In fact, designating this Japanese practice of painting as Western painting irritated nationalist sentiments at various points in the career of the term “Yōga,” periodically leading speakers to prefer *abura-e*. The emergence of a new category, “contemporary art” (*gendai bijutsu*), relieved the term “Yōga” of the task of designating contemporary painting, except for amateur and academic salon practice where the ethos of originality and progress was greatly diminished.¹⁶ In one sign of this decline, in the mid-1950s, the Japanese government discontinued its sponsorship of Yōga (as well as Nihonga) as representative Japanese art at international exhibitions in favor of “contemporary art.”¹⁷ Nevertheless, “Yōga” enjoys continued favor as an art historical term; recent scholars and curators continue to find it useful in designating the lineage of modern Japanese painters who were absorbed with European oil-on-canvas painting from the late nineteenth through the mid-twentieth centuries.

AN INTERCULTURAL MEDIUM

The study of Yōga would benefit from a greater appreciation of its role as an intercultural medium, that is, as a means for facilitating and managing relations between cultures. Some manner of East-West binary colors most writing on Yōga. In some cases, Yōga is reduced to the product of “influence” emanating from sources in the West to Japan (in the East), where it retained epiphenomenal status.¹⁸ To be sure, this narrative structure has been deployed skillfully, producing valuable research into Yōga’s art historical models in the West, especially the art world of Paris.¹⁹ Nevertheless, anxiety about the reduction of Yōga to Western imitation, which is a tendency fostered by the study of Yōga as a product of “influence,” has tended to provoke nationalist defense and overemphasis on the Japanese assimilation of Yōga in accounts such as that of art historian Shimada Yasuhiro: “The ‘Japanization of oil painting’ was the greatest task for oil painters in Japan from the very moment oil painting was imported from the West where it had originated and developed. It was a task that was innate in its own existence here.”²⁰ In this view, Yōga advanced along a track from regrettable foreignness at the point of importation to desired nativity by developing what Shimada described as “Japanese sensibility . . . embodied in the choice of subject as well as in its representation and expression.” While painters sought to infuse

Japanese aesthetic sensibility or subject matter into European oil painting, as Norman Bryson has demonstrated, Yōga painters also experienced a deep sense of gratification just by creating paintings that were “self-conscious, even ostentatious *displays* of familiarity and intimacy with European culture.”²¹ Moreover, the process of “Japanizing oil painting” was itself motivated and informed at every step with values and concepts such as “national art” that were provoked in Japanese minds by awareness of European perspectives.

The East/West binary has also impacted Yōga historiography by promoting attention to the relationship between Yōga and Nihonga. Indeed, the parallel development of these two movements of painting is surely one of the most striking features of modern Japanese painting, and theorizing this relationship has been a particularly productive concern of Yōga studies. These two schools of modern Japanese painting have been seen as a kind of interactive bicameral system, described, for instance, as “opposing mirrors,” “double-othering,” and “a dynamic structure.”²² Despite the interconnectedness of Nihonga and Yōga in these models, however, this manner of pairing them in a binary tends to situate Yōga on the periphery of the nation and Nihonga at the core of the nation. Yōga did mobilize an outward-looking gaze, but this was typically undertaken with constant preoccupation with the ramifications of the foreign for the nation at its imagined “core.”

John Clark’s focus on “the transfer” of artworks, styles, and techniques from Europe not just to Japan but to cultures throughout Asia allows for a more open framework for identifying a greater range of actors who undertook specific operations of relocating cultural properties.²³ Clark outlines three modalities governing the conduct of such transfers: production, pedagogy, and consumption. Individual and collective or institutional producers of art and imagery in Asia sought and obtained new visual modes from external sources. Teachers in both academic and private studio or workshop contexts transferred pedagogies of art to Asian contexts, thereby enabling secondary transmission to additional practitioners. Consumers, including small-scale or elite importers, purchasers, and collectors, acquired objects and images and situated them in Asian contexts of reception. Clark cautions that such transfers were conditioned by the balance of power between the culture of origin and the culture of destination. Moreover, whether the transfer was destined for a colonial, semicolonial, or noncolonial culture, the relocation generated new meanings and social functions that were often beyond comprehension to Euramericans, owing to their presumption of the accuracy of their own interpretation.²⁴ Clark’s framework enables a contextualization of Yōga in a broader geography of intercultural transactions than

studies focused on the movement of European art to Japan alone. Similar “transfers” analogous to those that conveyed properties of European art to Japan under the auspices of Yōga reached destinations throughout Asia.

Satō Dōshin further opened up the geographical purview of Yōga by suggesting that in late Meiji thought the concept of “the West” (*seiyō*) signified a much broader geography than, for example, the Parisian art world or the European imperial powers. “The West” alluded to the whole world, since the world was perceived as being centered on “the West.” In this sense, Satō maintains, the term “Yōga” operated more as “international painting” than “Western painting.”²⁵ Thus, more than comprising a flow of artistic ideas from Europe to Japan, Yōga can be understood as the Japanese recognition and response to a global geography that was Eurocentrically organized. The Paris art world was indeed a mecca for the Yōga painters in this study, but readers will also learn of their preoccupations with far-flung global sites of interest beyond Europe: Attu Island in Alaska, Algeria, the Arabian Peninsula, Beijing and other parts of the Chinese mainland (such as Shaanxi), India, Indonesia, Korea, Manchuria, Mexico, Mongolia, Taiwan, and the United States. Yōga developed in and furthered global consciousness of a sort that induced individuals to regard themselves as members of one nation situated among many in a world centered on the West. This broad international awareness underlying Yōga is highly significant if, as Yamanashi Emiko suggests, Yōga served as “an important factor in Japan’s understanding and reception of western culture.”²⁶ For now Yōga emerges as a viewfinder for the understanding and reception of a potentially global range of others. Thus, although the East/West binary was a very common yardstick for measuring others in the Yōga context, the complexity of the intercultural components of the mediations themselves defy the procrustean metric of this dualistic framework.

I would propose further that the Yōga engagement with various cultural others was often much more active than the terms “understanding and receiving” would suggest. Thus, in a minor dust up in 1932 in the continuing rivalry between Yōga and Nihonga, proponents of Yōga sought to silence their critics by affirming this active stance.²⁷ In response to the nationalist challenge to Yōga’s legitimacy as a medium of Japanese art, one Yōga painter belittled this opposition as the “faint-heartedness of people of an isolated island” and a second elaborated on this stance by asserting that “An attitude of national seclusion [*sakokuteki ishiki*] is an obstacle to progress.”²⁸ In this view, artistic progress demanded an assertive practice reaching beyond the borders of Japan. This was a time of imperial expansion overseas

that stimulated a more dynamic outgoing stance of Japanese artists than the “faint-heartedness of people of an isolated island.” Indeed, as we shall see in Chapter 3, Yōga served increasingly as a medium of Japanese relations with various peoples of the territories of the Japanese Empire. Yōga was tasked with mediating the increasing volume of voluntary and involuntary contact with other cultures that is a feature of imperialism as well as globalization.

Moreover, not only did Yōga serve as a medium for Japanese people contending with others, it also became an important focus for artists from other parts of Asia. From the 1890s through the 1930s, hundreds of Chinese art students sought Yōga training in the national academy and other art schools in Japan. “Becoming like the West,” it has been acknowledged, was a goal for these students, though the fact that Japan was a much more common destination for aspiring Chinese artists than Europe suggests that they regarded the Tokyo-centered Yōga community as a way station that was more accessible than the Europe of their ultimate yearnings.²⁹ But Yōga’s role as surrogate European painting could also cause confusion; the first generation of Korean artists devoted to Western painting (*soyang-hwa*), who trained in Japan in the 1910s, found it “difficult . . . to distinguish between Japanese Western-style art and true European art.”³⁰ Thus, the multilateral complexity and blurring of borders that transpired in Yōga’s vast “contact zone” between Japanese, Asian, and European perspectives of modern art belies the binary geography suggested by East/West rhetoric.³¹

One of the most distinctive qualities of the “contacts” enabled by Yōga discourse and practice was their physical nature. Intimate encounters between bodies or between bodies and representations of bodies were endemic to Yōga practice. The act of viewing a Yōga painting was often an intense contemplation of an image of one or more bodies, while painting students typically scrutinized the often naked bodies of live models and copied ideal bodies depicted in canonical works. Frequently these Yōga experiences of bodies entailed contact with racially or culturally foreign bodies, accompanied by an erotic or violent frisson. The visualization of the Other was variously undertaken with ethnographic attention to attributes of cultural difference, voyeuristic absorption with the erotic body, or the hostility of visualizing the enemy in war painting.

In addition to its mediation of various others from Japanese and Asian perspectives, Yōga’s intercultural character was also a function of its provision of self-imagery designed for optimum performance in real or imagined conditions of international rivalry. For example, in the course of the previ-

ously mentioned 1932 exchange between proponents of Yōga and Nihonga, the Yōga painter Nabei Katsuyuki outlined strategies for the success of Yōga in international competition:

You may appreciate the spirit of the new age in artists such as Picasso and Braque, but you will attain new meaning by taking up pictorial themes such as classical Japanese architecture . . . or other Japanese topics. This will allow exhibiting in Paris without the work seeming like that of a French person or American. It is necessary to rise at least to parity with French people's oil painting technique. This is my ideal. Since Japanese people and American people are completely different in terms of character, it would be desirable for this [difference] to be expressed.³²

This painter's objective was Japanese oil painting that would perform well in Paris. In his estimation of metropolitan connoisseurs' criteria for judging Japanese painting, Yōga needed to accomplish two things to succeed—it had to be realized with excellent oil painting technique, and it had to manifest some form of Japanese character intelligible to foreigners by virtue of its apparent contrast to French or American character. In this statement, global consciousness takes the form of an exhibition-like comparison of oil paintings, where French, American, and Japanese artists express the distinctive character of their respective nations. The range of contestants was in fact much wider than these three nationalities, and while studying in Paris, Japanese artists came in contact with other artists from all over the world who were similarly drawn by the reputation of this city as the international center of modern art.

While Yōga fostered “connections” such as these, which brought Japanese painters or viewers into direct contact with individuals and cultures of distant regions, the practice of Yōga also opened up a broad sphere of “resonances” with other visual cultures. Reiko Tomii has used the terms “connections” and “resonances” to differentiate actual instances of cultural transmission or contact from the unwitting affinities and similarities proceeding from the impact of parallel forces of globalization.³³ Because of the hiatus in the Japanese acquisition of European painting resulting from the expulsion of Christians from Japan in the seventeenth century, the proficiency achieved in European painting by Japanese painters occurred relatively late, compared, for example, to Mexico and India. Under Spanish and British

colonization, respectively, these regions possessed sophisticated traditions and institutions of European painting long before Yōga brought Japanese visual culture into closer commensurability in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.³⁴ Once achieved, this commensurability set the stage for further convergence when avant-gardists in Japan and many other regions pursued similar trajectories of opposition to academic art. Indeed, the occupational shift of the early Kurosawa Akira from Yōga painter to film director may be indicative of a larger historical relationship between the globalization of oil painting and later media of globalization such as film. Thus, Yōga was driven by a global consciousness that satisfied a desire or need for contact with various others and expanded the scope of its resonance with a still broader range of others.

ART OF EMBODIMENT

I have identified Yōga as a movement of painting defined by its vexed and contested relationship to “the West,” a relationship inscribed by the very term “Yōga.” I have further maintained that “the West,” however, designated a broader global consciousness than, for example, the narrow focus on the Paris art world or the European imperial powers that have sometimes been identified as Yōga’s primary preoccupation. Thus, Yōga was an intercultural medium that performed the social service of generating and managing contacts with a wide range of others. Nevertheless, this description leaves an important question unanswered: what distinctive visuality did the protagonists of Yōga seek from European painting and contribute to modern Japanese visual culture, a media economy that included such other media as Nihonga, sculpture, film, photography, book illustration, and advertising graphics? I answer this question by outlining a paradigm of embodied representation that I believe is definitive of Yōga. Embodiment in Yōga can be conceptualized in four distinct registers: (1) the materiality of oil paint pigments on the picture surface, (2) the illustration of the human body, (3) the imagined somatic presence of the artist in the painting, and (4) rhetorical metaphors of political and social incorporation. The following paragraphs describe these four forms of Yōga embodiment.

(1) Artists used the material substance of oil paint on the picture plane to give body to their visual perceptions or aesthetic sensibilities. Oil paint is a slow-drying medium that superseded the quick-drying medium of egg

tempera in Renaissance Europe because of its capacity for richer and denser color, a greater range of darks and lights, smoother gradations, fuller chromatic and atmospheric naturalism, and more three-dimensional modeling of volumetric form in space. Oil paint did not figure in the repertoire of painting practice in Japan until its acquisition from Europe, and the same qualities that had won over Europeans led many Japanese artists to reject the water-soluble mineral and organic pigments and ink of earlier Japanese painting practice. To be sure, the pictorial arts of Europe extended well beyond oil painting, and European media such as lithography and watercolor were also enthusiastically incorporated into Japanese artistic practice. But as mentioned above, by the 1880s, Yōga had come to be equated primarily with oil painting, partly because of its striking contrast to the water-soluble media of earlier East Asian painting practice.

At first, oil painting was esteemed in Japan as a means of obtaining realistic and durable representations. But in one of the most momentous developments in the history of the Yōga movement, the fused brushstrokes of academic realism were progressively disaggregated into gestural brushstrokes. Thus, with increasing awareness of European modernist painting, the oil-paint medium became a vehicle for recording minute inflections of the artist's temperament or personal character, a potential sensationalized in Kurosawa Akira's immersion of a Japanese painter in the magnified brushwork of van Gogh. But whether the realism of early Meiji Yōga or the modernist idiom that entered Yōga practice in the 1910s and became the prevalent mode of Yōga by the 1930s, mastery of techniques of handling the specific material properties of oil paint was consistently an important objective of this movement. Much like their counterparts elsewhere, Yōga painters were typically engrossed with the facture of brush handling, the *matière* of the picture surface, and indeed with the allure of oil-paint pigment as "life's blood."³⁵

(2) The second sense of Yōga embodiment centers on the painted depiction of compelling images of human bodies. Admittedly, this type of embodiment would seem of little relevance to the nonfigurative genres that were also mainstays of Yōga practice, namely, still life and landscape painting. Nevertheless, even in the absence of literal images of human bodies, nonfigurative Yōga imagery was often read in terms of the human body. For example, as discussed in Chapter 3, Umehara Ryūzaburō's rendition of antique Chinese porcelain vases in still life painting was appreciated with the thought that he viewed and painted these ceramic vessels as though they

were “naked living breathing flesh.”³⁶ And the depiction of rocky outcroppings in mountainous landscapes by Fukuzawa Ichirō, a Surrealist Yōga painter discussed in Chapter 4, reminded one critic of “anatomical diagrams of muscles.”³⁷ The impulse to paint or interpret paintings of flower vases and mountains as human body imagery can be attributed to the system and development of Yōga representation. In 1928, Koide Narashige reaffirmed the principle that rendering the human body, especially the nude, was “the foundational technique of oil painting and its most compelling motif.”³⁸ Thus, years after graduating from the Yōga curriculum established by Kuroda Seiki at the national academy in the 1890s, Koide remained faithful to one of the major tenets of Kuroda’s pedagogy of art. For the art of painting that Kuroda had absorbed as a student in Paris and transmitted to his students in Tokyo privileged the study of the human body.³⁹

In this system and in much Yōga painting practice, the artist constructed the human image by direct observation of the live bodies of posed models, a procedure virtually unknown in Japanese figure painting before the advent of Yōga. Typically, Yōga artists crafted images of bodies with techniques that originated in Europe, such as anatomical study, the classical canon of proportions, life study of the nude, spatialization of the body according to Renaissance perspective, or subjection of the body to modernist deformation. Conventional art-historical terms for genres of figurative painting provide a rudimentary taxonomy of these bodies: history painting, portraiture, self-portraiture, the nude, and battle scenery. But the diverse array of human images that issued from the Yōga movement invites a more socially nuanced approach: What drove Yōga painters to define and redefine templates for admired as well as abject personal embodiment? How did these painted bodies incarnate ideals of intimate, professional, gendered, and political identity?

We can begin to answer these questions by comparing the Yōga industry of body-image production to contemporaneous discourses of eugenics. For like the social scientists and ideologues in Japan and elsewhere who endeavored to improve the bodies of the younger and future members of their society through strategic measures such as identifying deficiencies, improving diet, genetic engineering, not to mention sterilization, painters stretched and vivified oil-on-canvas bodies with fervent anticipation that these images would have a beneficial impact on the actual bodies of the people in their real or imagined audiences.⁴⁰ As we shall see, however, such anticipations were complicated by fears that the painterly idealizations and improvements of the body proffered by Yōga pedagogy might constitute alienating Westernizations of the Japanese body.

(3) A third sort of embodiment emerged in Yōga discourse in the early twentieth century as this type of painting became increasingly identified with the individual artistic Self. Whether or not the painting was literally a self-portrait, it was valued as an artifact resonating with the distinctive sensibility of the artist. In Kurosawa's film, the notion of contact between the spectator and the painter receives a strangely literal form, as the spectator actually enters the fictive painted space, encounters van Gogh in the act of painting, and talks to him. But the belief that the act of viewing a painting put the spectator into meaningful contact with some fundamental physical quality of the artist was a common Yōga preoccupation, typically expressed by projecting bodily metaphors onto aesthetic qualities of the brushwork. Several of the artists discussed in this book were deeply smitten by what they believed was the unbridled physical investment of van Gogh (and other mythic figures of modern European painting) in their paintings. For example, Satomi Katsuzō, who was among the Yōga artists who made pilgrimage-like journeys to van Gogh's grave site and whose nudes are discussed in Chapter 2, imagined his own act of painting as "a throwing out of my stark naked whole."⁴¹ Similarly, Umehara Ryūzaburō's landscape painting was admired for its "uninhibited brushwork that seems to take in a deep contemplation of nature and throw his guts out onto the canvas [*kanbasu ni shinzō o buchitsukeru*]."⁴² In such rhetoric of appreciation, the character of the artist was accessed by the viewer through brushstrokes resonating with a somatic presence of the artist denoted by metaphorically projecting parts of the artist's body into the painting. The artist's flesh was mobilized as a sign authenticating the oil-on-canvas image with a sense of passionate immediacy.

(4) Allusions to the artist's or the depicted figure's flesh, blood, skin, energy, sexuality, and other physical attributes of the body were often charged with more socially nuanced ideological concerns. Metaphorical terms of embodiment were deployed to designate and valorize various groups of people on whose behalf Yōga paintings were presumed to be painted. Among the most important units of social belonging for artists were the artists' group, the art world, the Japanese nation, the Japanese Empire, and the Orient. The artists' group ranged from a small family-like cénacle of individuals who shared artistic ideals and pooled resources for collective exhibitions to large bureaucratic exhibition associations with ranks, prizes, and affiliated schools. The art world (*gadan*) was a national community of artists as well as critics, journalists, collectors, publishers, dealers, hobbyists, and exhibition viewers, who were linked by publications, factions, media, exhibi-

tions, debates, and institutions that focused on works of art. The medium of Yōga defined one of the largest and most powerful factions of the Japanese art world throughout the early and mid-twentieth century. The “health” of the art world was an ongoing preoccupation, and its greater ideological importance was articulated by entrusting it with specific functions for the larger social body of the nation; the *raison d’être* of the art world was the production of *Japanese* art for the good of the nation. For instance, the critical question in the previously mentioned art world turf war of 1932 was whether Yōga or Nihonga was better suited to serve as “national painting” (*kokuga*).⁴³ Such terms as “national painting” resonated with metaphors of the body employed in early-twentieth-century Japanese political discourse and terms such as “national body” (*kokutai*), promoted by official state ideologues to denote a timeless spiritual bond between Japanese subjects and the emperor. Another important term in Japanese cultural theory of this period was the “communal body” (*kyōdōtai*), which in Harry Harootunian’s characterization served as an “organ of expression” possessing “a kind of beautiful corporeality.” Harootunian adds, “as the matter of nature, physis, the body was transformed through work into a national artwork.”⁴⁴ Yōga images of the body performed this sort of ideological labor for the nation and its imperial expansion in the Orient.

These four notions of embodiment—the materiality of the oil-paint pigments, the depiction of the human body, the somatic self-expression of the artist, and the metaphors of social incorporation—may seem to have little in common with one another beside their location within the elastic semantic range of embodiment. Similarly, the character 体 (*karada* or *tai*, body) not only appears in the compounds “national body” (*kokutai*) and “communal body” (*kyōdōtai*), but serves multiple signifying tasks in an almost random array of other Japanese compounds. What do the rich encrustation of the picture surface in the medium of oil painting, the depiction of anatomically studied or deformed human bodies, the projection of the artist’s physical Self into the painting, and the use of metaphors of the body in political and social agendas promoted in the discourse of painting have to do with one another? I contend that these types of embodiment often operated in concert with one another in Yōga practice and discourse and, further, that the distinctive visuality of the movement and medium of Yōga lies in their interaction.

Of course these modes of embodiment do not hold the key to understanding every Yōga painting or Yōga painter. In the early twentieth century,

Yōga was a vast sector of Japanese visual culture, encompassing a wide spectrum of ideological positions from reactionary conservatism to radical leftism and diverse styles from academic realism to avant-gardist abstraction. The four principles of embodiment outlined above do not apply evenly to every type of painting associated with this movement. Rather this approach attempts to identify qualities considered paradigmatic of Yōga and characterize distinctive properties contributed by Yōga to modern Japanese visual culture.

Two notable offshoots of the Yōga movement deserve mention here for their critique and revision of Yōga embodiment: the Proletarian Art movement of the late 1920s and early 1930s, and abstract art of the late 1930s.⁴⁵ Numerous Yōga painters, including Kurosawa Akira for a few years prior to his turn to cinema, joined the Proletarian Art movement in the early Shōwa years. Most of these artists were trained in mainstream Yōga institutions and possessed Yōga skills and techniques for rendering strongly embodied figures, but they refocused the ideological aims of their art of embodiment on the proletariat. Thus, one proletarian painter encouraged a colleague in his efforts to paint the figure of a peasant in language of physical passion that nearly slips into the rhetoric of the Yōga nude that we shall encounter in Chapter 2: “You can actually reconstruct the living human peasant in a painting. And surely there is no joy like that of making a human clearly one’s own. If you, as a human being . . . can realize a painting like this, we will congratulate you even more heartily than if you find a lover.”⁴⁶ Proletarian art was defined by the chief secretary of the Japan Proletarian Artists’ League as “art of the exploited class—the poor, the unpropertied, and others, including peasants . . . representing their interests by fighting with determination against the exploiters—the capitalists, the landowners . . . the ruling class.”⁴⁷ Thus, proletarian Yōga channeled the tools of Yōga embodiment toward ideological aims that were violently opposed to those of mainstream Yōga. The very elites that proletarian art sought to destroy were enabled and protected by mainstream Yōga, for example, by providing figures of embodiment for the nation-state that reserved positions of privilege and authority for them.

In contrast to the desire for strong body imagery in proletarian Yōga, abstract art, which built on earlier sporadic investigations of abstraction by Japanese avant-gardists and became a broad tendency in progressive circles of Japanese art in the late 1930s, derived much of its avant-garde energy from “purifying” art of all vestiges of human flesh. Under the umbrella of the Yōga movement but in strident opposition to its conservative standard-bearers,

a continuous series of avant-garde insurgencies introduced shocking new types of figuration, some of which gradually achieved establishment acceptance. The shift from academic realism to a more gestural modernist idiom has already been mentioned, and Surrealist deformation of the body will be touched upon in Chapters 1 and 4. But the abstraction that prevailed in the late 1930s was an avant-garde that often distanced painting from topics of the body in a manner that was exceptional in Yōga discourse, even while maintaining the term “Yōga,” for example, as the name of exhibitions such as the New Age Yōga Exhibition (Shin Jidai Yōga Ten).⁴⁸ Some avant-gardists contributed to Yōga embodiment, or rather disembodiment, by their propensity to submit the body to a painterly deformation or destruction. As we shall see, disembodiment is a key dimension of Yōga embodiment, but abstraction of the late 1930s was intent on eschewing the body altogether, along with mimesis. Hasegawa Saburō, a former student of Koide Narashige, became one of the leading exponents of abstraction and a prominent spokesperson for this eschewal of the body. He argued that since advances in aviation technology were driven by abstract thinking such as mathematical study of floating solids rather than by the illustrative depiction of birds, artists should likewise seek to “humanly reconstruct [reality] with the modern organization of understanding through geometry, physics, and psychology.”⁴⁹ Hasegawa felt that the whole messy business of investing the image of the human body with narrative and literary content was better consigned to photography and film than coerced from oil on canvas, a medium he now regarded as ill suited for this task.

Nonetheless, neither the late 1930s wave of Japanese abstraction nor the earlier Proletarian Art movement succeeded in derailing mainstream Yōga from its core values of oil-on-canvas embodiment. Perhaps the commitment of both movements to oil on canvas was weak from the start; proletarian painters tended to move into the media of illustration, poster design, and comics in order to reach a broader audience, while abstractionists sometimes shifted from painting to collage and photography. Moreover, proletarian art was suppressed on political/ideological grounds by the state in the 1930s, and abstraction was discouraged by authorities as a radical tendency in the fascist climate of total war at the end of the decade.

Notwithstanding the significant deviations of proletarian and abstract Yōga, paradigmatically speaking, the Yōga painter was one who sought to master imported techniques of wresting palpable images of human bodies from the material of oil paint and deployed these body images to serve the

sociopolitical ends of visualizing and concretizing notions of the body politic that were more or less supportive of ideological goals associated with the state. This book traces various relationships between painters' studio techniques of brush and pigment handling, the depiction of human bodies, and ideological expression. As we shall see, this trajectory from brushwork and painted body imagery to ideology often facilitated a second trajectory, from painters' stimulating or traumatic encounters with the Euramerican others whose presence is inscribed in the term "Yōga" toward their triumphant or defiant expression of native selfhood.

GENRES OF EMBODIMENT IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

While an account of the emergence and institutionalization of Yōga would focus on the Meiji period (1868–1912), this study examines how the habits of thought and practice that had emerged in Yōga discourse were applied, challenged, and transformed after the Meiji period. In contrast to the Meiji period ethos of subordinating individual welfare and fulfillment to the causes of strengthening the state and building the empire, a climate of liberalization allowed greater individual expression in the Taishō period (1912–1925), sometimes referred to as the Taishō Democracy. By the mid-1920s, however, tolerance, consumerism, and sensuous expression gave way to increasing militarism and fascism. Indeed, a pattern of rampant ultranationalist terrorism, including the assassination of three sitting prime ministers and two former prime ministers, furthered Japanese society's advance toward a state of total war. The Japanese Empire waged war continuously from 1931 until 1945, with fronts in China gradually expanding throughout Asia and the Pacific region. Japanese artists and other citizens were often elated by the expansion of their nation's colonial holdings, and many experienced the string of Japanese military victories starting with the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 with exhilaration. The vast territories thus incorporated into the Japanese Empire, however, were abruptly shorn away by the terms of unconditional surrender in 1945, which also abrogated Japanese sovereignty with a seven-year period of military occupation. After sustained hardship and economic privation, citizens began to experience the material benefits of war recovery in the 1950s, when the Japanese government assumed the role of a junior

partner to the United States in the cold war, a stance that provoked enormous domestic protest.

Yōga served the Japanese nation continuously through this roller coaster trajectory of history by furnishing a steady flow of vivid images of bodies. This book is not a full-court survey of the complex stylistic development or institutional history of Yōga; rather it advances interpretations of some of the most compelling, well-known, and in some cases disturbing icons of Japanese embodiment in this turbulent period. A series of case studies collectively delineates the strategies of embodiment and disembodiment that characterize this movement's contribution to the ideological and social makeup of the nation. The four chapters following this introduction focus on specific genres and overlapping historical periods. Each chapter examines several Yōga painters not biographically, but rather with a focus on their frustrations and accomplishments in the pursuit of specific aims characteristic of the Yōga movement. These aims are strengthening the Self through self-portraiture (Chapter 1), creating desirable Japanese female bodies in paintings of the nude (Chapter 2), and incorporating tropes of China that directly or indirectly contributed to Japanese imperial aims (Chapter 3). Chapter 4 demonstrates how these various modes of maximizing Japanese embodiment collapsed under the pressures of war and defeat in images of battlefield death, martyrdom, and extreme dehumanization. Thus, the Yōga paintings discussed in these four chapters—as well as works by countless other Yōga painters—narrate a shift from valiant struggles to garner strongly embodied positions of subjectivity early in the century to despairing efforts to fathom and mediate horrifying experiences in real life by Japanese subjects during and after the war. Visions of maximum embodiment succumbed to realities of maximum disembodiment.

Chapters 1 and 2 both examine post-Meiji Yōga painters' strategies for diminishing the vexing Westernness that continued to mark their art and professional identities in a social climate of increasingly acute Japanese nationalism. I start with the Taishō period for this account of Yōga because the 1910s and 1920s mark the initial acquisition of European modes of self-portraiture and the nude by painters who transformed these two genres into instruments of nativist expression, topics of Chapters 1 and 2. Chapter 1 demonstrates how painters' portrayal of their own bodies in oil-on-canvas self-portraiture in the Taishō period and then again more anxiously during the Pacific War in the early 1940s bolstered a type of individual selfhood vaunted by concurrent debates known as the discourse of the Self. Chapter

2 applies a similar argument to the genre of the Yōga nude; male painters of the female nude enjoyed benefits of the heterosexual structure of Pygmalion creation of objects of sexual attraction that were designed to flatter or eugenically augment national, racial, and aesthetic qualities of the Self. I term this phenomenon “erotic nationalism.”

While Chapters 1 and 2 focus on specifically Japanese physical and cultural mediations of European painting, Chapter 3 moves beyond the Japanese nation to demonstrate Japanese imperial functions of Yōga. At a time when Japanese expansion in Asia had usurped China’s historical position of centrality among Asian cultures, Yōga painters invested their practices of European painting with diverse references to Chinese culture. These tropes of China diffused the tension between the Westernness of the painters’ medium and the Japanese identification they desired for their art and at the same time aggrandized imperial aspirations by, for example, rendering Yōga into “Oriental painting” (*tōyōga*) that was conducive to imagining new geographies such as the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.

Like van Gogh’s Japanese acolyte in Kurosawa’s film, Yōga painters dreamed that their métier could provide extraordinary qualities of embodiment. But maximum embodiment was a tantalizing goal, rarely attained to satisfaction. Among the obstacles to fulfilling the promise of ideal embodiment in Yōga was the alienating sense of otherness attributed to the *matière* of oil-painting pigments, the foreign bodies that were often regarded as the native motifs of Yōga depiction, as well as the social, cultural, and racial identities seen as privileged by Yōga. As we shall see, Yōga painters proved very resourceful in overcoming these obstacles to mobilizing Yōga embodiment at the service of Japanese subjects. Nonetheless, the later stages of Yōga are characterized by increasing tendencies toward disembodiment. In twentieth-century European painting, too, the same properties of oil painting that promised a strong sense of embodiment were often inversely deployed to evoke disturbing and sometimes horrifying qualities of disembodiment—the violation, dispersal, and fragmentation of depicted anatomies. Chapter 4 identifies a Yōga genre of disembodiment constituted by oil-on-canvas images by a diverse group of artists working in the context of the Pacific War and its aftermath in the postsurrender period. This thread is carried from pre-war Japanese Surrealism through state-sponsored war propaganda painting of battlefield carnage, war-defeat commemoration, and nihilistic postwar avant-gardism. Whereas the war propagandists destroyed bodies under the aegis of a glorified spiritualized national body, the avant-gardists mobilized

Introduction

a sense of crisis by annihilating all vestiges of humanistic sensibility. By the late 1950s, such pressures exploded the Yōga body in, for example, the abstract tableaus of the Informel movement, paintings suggestive of entrails spattered in decorative arrays of oil on canvas. This point is identified by the Epilogue of this book as the termination of Yōga embodiment.