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Japanese Modernism at a “Branch Point”: On the Museum of Modern Art, Hayama’s 1937 Exhibition

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Abstract

This article frames the Museum of Modern Art, Hayama’s 2017 exhibition on Japanese modernism during the simultaneously vibrant and tumultuous 1930s through the lens of Japan’s uneven capitalist development and wartime mobilization. The author suggests that the exhibition’s unique international scope, rich selection of figurative and abstract modernist works, and emphasis on the year 1937 as a nexus through which the decade’s competing tendencies can be reevaluated readily disclose the constitutive, dialectical relationships between historical difference, total war, and modernist form in imperial Japan and its colonies. The exhibition’s featured works and curator Asaki Yuka’s direction together emphasized the inseparability of Japanese modernism from the encroaching conditions of world war during the late 1930s, thereby contributing to a growing body of scholarship and series of exhibitions challenging the received oppositions between autonomous modernism, proletarian realism, and wartime propaganda. After introductory remarks on the reassessment of 1930s-era Japanese avant-garde aesthetics, the article provides a series of close readings of significant paintings included in the exhibition, including Murai Masanari’s 1937 *Urban*, Matsumoto Shunsuke’s 1935 *Building*, and Uchida Iwao’s 1937 *Port*. These formal readings explore how the year 1937 marked a pivotal “branch point” for Japanese society, not only in terms of the confluence of various artistic trends but also in terms of the fierce opposition between socialism and fascism that bifurcated potentialities for Japan’s future.

Keywords: modernism, imperial Japan, total war, fascism, uneven development, avant-garde, proletarian arts, 1930s, museum exhibitions

Introduction: The 1937 Exhibition

If the arts flourish after a war ends, the reason may be that artists are able to lift up their heads once peace is restored whereas they are oppressed and inhibited during the actual prosecution of war: it is certainly not that they are stimulated by war itself. - Kōtoku Shūsui¹

The Museum of Modern Art, Hayama's 2017 exhibition, *1937: Modernism at a Branch Point* (*Modanizumu no bunkiten*, hereafter *1937*), successfully conveys the remarkable breadth of interwar Japanese modernism and its distillation of imperial Japan's misadventures in Asia alongside the dissolution of the self with the rising tide of fascism in the metropole.² A short introductory essay by museum director Mizusawa Tsutomu (2017), "1937: The Radiance of Prewar and Postwar Modernism" ("1937: Sensō zengo modanizumu no kagayaki"), repeatedly stresses the relationship between the situation of rising world war, in both Europe and the Asian continent, and the context of modernist artistic production within Japan and the Soviet Union in the late 1930s. The exhibition brochure's English-language caption elucidates how "1937, when war intensified on the Chinese continent and Japan rapidly became militaristic, was a turning point in avant-garde art" (Museum of Modern Art 2017a). The exhibition's overall curatorial orientation provides a thorough examination of interwar modernism, which until recently stood in stark opposition to the politically oriented, proletarian realist camp. Combining these two trends, the exhibition makes a compelling addition to a recent series of progressive reexaminations of 1930s modernism's politico-historical location and legacy. The most notable example of this combination is the juxtaposition of the magazine *USSR in Construction*, with a documentary style similar to that of *Life* and featuring such Russian artist-designers as Es and El Lissitzky, with Japanese Dadaist group MAVO co-founder and later proletarian avant-gardist Murayama Tomoyoshi.

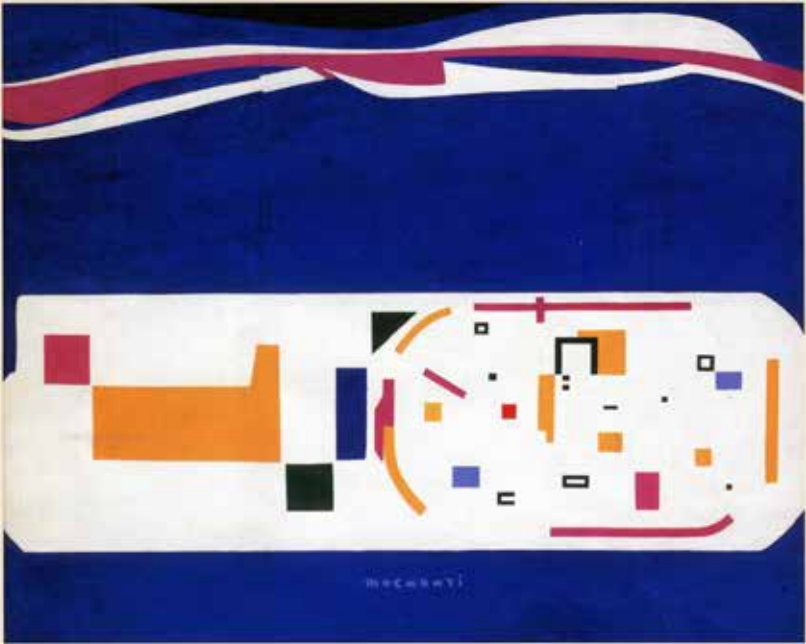
The confrontation of opposites, the combination of adjacent tendencies, and the intersection of contemporaneous trends each constitute the operative "branch point" (*bunkiten*)—a mathematical term for the convergence of complex functions in an algebraic formula. In short, dialectics is a recurring theme in the exhibition, as *1937* not only constituted the culmination or synthesis of various political and aesthetic currents leading up to that year but also presented a condensed site of competing possibilities for the future. Held from September 16 to November 5, 2017, in the city of Hayama along the western coast of the Miura Peninsula, *1937* presented an eclectic selection of works, ranging from surrealism (Kitawaki Noboru's *Study for Sacred Fire* and Koga Harue's *Circus*) to mixed stripes of realist figuration (Hara Seiichi's *Standing Young Man* and Gosei Abe's *Self-Portrait*) to bold geometric abstraction (Yoshihara Jiro's *Work*, Murai Masanari's *Urban*, and Hirohata Ken's *39xQG*). While the exhibition's first gallery contained

paintings by various Japanese modernists selected from the museum's permanent collection, the second gallery was dedicated to a voluminous series of textual interchanges between Japanese and European surrealists, including Yamanaka Tiroux, Takiguchi Shuzo, André Breton, and Paul Éluard, as well as to the aforementioned comparison between Soviet and Japanese proletarian avant-gardes (figures 1 and 2).³

コレクション展 1937 — モダニズムの分岐点

From Museum Collection:

1937 Modernism at a Branch Point



2017年9月16日(土) - 11月5日(日)

展示室3 Gallery 3

休 日：月曜日(ただし9月18日と10月9日は閉館)

観覧時間：午前9時30分～午後5時(入館は午後4時30分まで)

観 覧 料：一般250円(150円)、20歳未満と学生150円(100円)、65歳以上と高校生100円

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※2. 15歳未満の子供は無料です。
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神奈川県立近代美術館 葉山
The Museum of Modern Art, Hayama

主催：神奈川県立近代美術館
協力：慶應義塾大学目黒メディアセンター
協賛：芸術文化振興基金助成事業

Figure 1. 1937 Exhibition Flyer featuring Murai Masanari's *Urban*, 1937. Oil on canvas, 130 x 162 cm. ©The Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura and Hayama. Used with permission.

コレクション展 1937 — モダニズムの分岐点

本展は、1937年前後に焦点をあて、1930年代の日本の近代美術を紹介すると共に、同時代にみられた国内外の前衛美術の動向をたどるものです。

今から80年前の1937(昭和12)年。ヨーロッパで「アール・ヌーヴォー」や「道楽美術展」が開催されたこの年、日本では中国大陸での戦争が本格化し始めました。美術界では、「新文展」や大小さまざまな在野団体が発足し、また、前衛運動が活発に展開しつつも、それらは時流の変化に苦悶なく巻き込まれていきます。

本展では朝井朋也衛門、阿部合成、藤生三郎、内田雄、小野忠重、松本健介、村井正雄、吉原辺良などが1937年前後に制作した油絵、版画約50点を中心に、それぞれの作家が見つめていた世界を探ります。

また、四年に東京ほかで開催された「海外超現実主義作品展」に注目し、同展を企画した二人の詩人・批評家、瀧口修造と山中数生が、アンドレ・ブルトンやシュルレアリストたちと交わした書翰や原稿などを通して、前衛思潮との国際的な交流の一端を紹介いたします。あわせて、ロシア革命から20年を迎えたソヴェト連邦の宣伝グラフィック雑誌「インヴェスト連邦建設」や、村山30画による映画・演劇活動を記録したスクラップブックなどを揃え、同時代のモダニズムの行方を追います。









①	②	③	④
⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧

① 中野忠重油の子(油画)1937年 本画、油絵
 ② 藤生三郎(油画)1938年 油絵、エッチング 複製
 ③ 阿部合成(油画)1937年 油絵、エッチング 複製
 ④ 瀧口修造(油画)1937年 油絵、エッチング 複製
 ⑤ 朝井朋也(油画)1937年 油絵、エッチング 複製
 ⑥ 朝井朋也(油画)1937年 油絵、エッチング 複製
 ⑦ 朝井朋也(油画)1937年 油絵、エッチング 複製
 ⑧ 朝井朋也(油画)1937年 油絵、エッチング 複製



関連企画

- 観音によるオープニング・トーク
 『生誕140年 マックス・クリンガー—版画展』&コレクション展「1937—モダニズムの分岐点」について
 日時: 9月18日(土)午後2時-3時 会場: 高松宮前
 申込不要、無料(ただしマックス・クリンガー—版画展)の当日観覧券が必要です。
- 学芸員によるギャラリー・トーク
 日時: 9月23日(土)-24日(日)午後2時-3時、10月2日(土)午後2時-3時
 会場: 高松宮前
 イベント申込不要、無料(ただしコレクション展または『マックス・クリンガー—版画展』の当日観覧券が必要です。)
- 近代美術入門講座(山中数生)
 『海外超現実主義作品展』1937年について (講師: 朝井朋也(高松宮前))
 日時: 9月23日(土)-24日(日)午後10時-11時 会場: 高松宮前文化会館 大会議室 申込不要、無料

開館時間

『生誕140年 マックス・クリンガー—版画展』 開館15:2

粟山館への交通案内

電車とバス: JR横須賀線「湯子」駅(徒歩約10分)、または京浜東北線「新湯子」駅(徒歩約10分)から徒歩約20分。バス: 12系統(海軍団前)「三+三」(バスがおり) 徒歩約5分(徒歩約20分)。

車: 横浜横須賀道路湯子インターチェンジ、または横須賀インターチェンジからそれぞれ7-8km。

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The Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura & Hayama
 The Museum of Modern Art, Hayama

〒240-0111 神奈川県三浦郡栗山町一色 2205-1
 Tel.044-875-2800
<http://www.moma.pref.kanagawa.jp>
 @KanagawaMoMA



Figure 2. Back of 1937 exhibition flyer. Oil on canvas, 130 x 162 cm. ©The Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura and Hayama. Used with permission.

In this article, I will first survey the terrain of 1930s-era modernism in Japan and subsequent scholarly and curatorial approaches to this complicated historical period, delineate the specificity of the exhibition in question, and finally proceed to a series of formal readings of several paintings on exhibition through which I address a number of relevant themes, including total war, uneven development, and modernization.

Revisiting the 1930s

During the last two decades, a burgeoning field of scholarship adumbrated by the heading “new modernist studies” has challenged the hitherto persistent treatment of a purportedly autonomous modernism and politicized art in rigid separation. Scholars of global modernism have posed this challenge by simultaneously expanding the category’s “temporal, spatial, and vertical dimensions” (Mao and Walkowitz 2008, 737). In Japan, the 1937 exhibition comes in the wake of a growing body of scholarly and curatorial reinvestigations of the political contexts circumscribing modernist experimentation. Unlike postwar Western modernism’s collusion with CIA-backed programs to counter socialist realism in the Eastern bloc, given theoretical justification by American art critic Clement Greenberg’s influential essay “Modernist Painting” ([1961] 1993), prewar modernism in Japan and its colonies was, together with the proletarian movement, threatened by the draconian Peace Preservation Law (*Chian ijihō*), revealing its political edge in the face of these historical currents. Japanese art historian and curator Omuka Toshiharu (2017) aptly refers to this crisis-ridden situation as “modernism in a state of emergency” (*hijōji no modanizumu*). Although the proletarian camp and modernists in the Taishō and early Shōwa periods remained, on personal or historical terms, relatively distinct—displaying much of the rabid factionalism plaguing the European avant-gardes—from a wider perspective, the two can be said to have shared an oppositional stance toward the increasingly fascist and militarist state.⁴

In postwar Japanese art scholar and critic Alexandra Munroe’s assessment of the avant-garde milieu of the time, reacting to both its conservative predecessors and contemporaries, she writes that “Futurism, Constructivism, Dada, and Surrealism—all allied with the political left—were introduced to Japan where they stimulated an activist, literary, and passionately international counterculture” (1994, 22). Some prominent Dadaists, such as poet Hagiwara Kyōjirō, were committed to anarchism, whereas others, such as poet Tsuboi Shigeji and artist Murayama Tomoyoshi, even made the switch from Dadaism to the proletarian movement, thus further blurring this easy opposition.⁵

Recognizing the difficulties in deciding on a singular, precise (*genmitsu*) definition of modernism, Omuka’s (2003) introduction to the momentous edited volume *Modernism/Nationalism (Modanizumu/Nashonarizumu)*, “Why the 1930s?” (“Naze 1930

nendaika”), situates 1930s-era aesthetics in the context of global political upheavals, including antimodernist pressure from socialist realism in Russia, National Socialism in Germany, and the birth and collapse (*hōkai*) of Taishō democracy (1912–1926) in Japan. Omuka provides a helpful genealogy of curatorial and scholarly reexaminations of this period from the 1980s onward resulting from a confluence of factors, especially the death of Emperor Hirohito in 1989—and the reminiscence (*kaiko*) on the Shōwa period it motivated—and the introduction of postmodern theory—and the genealogical (*keitōjuteki*), plural (*fukusō*), and multilayered (*jūsōteki*) approaches it encouraged domestically and internationally.

Drawing from Russian art historian Boris Groys’s reflections on what he calls the “total art of Stalinism,” Omuka heeds the dangers of an “aestheticization of politics” (*seiji no bigakuka*) indicated by the “slash” (*surasshu*) between art and politics in the volume’s title *Modernism/Nationalism*. Groys recounts how in the early Bolshevik years, “the avant-garde itself renounces its right of preeminence and surrenders the project to real political power, which is beginning to take over the avant-garde artist’s task of drawing up the unitary plan of the new reality” (2011, 26). Omuka’s overall argument suggests that in Japan, Italy, Germany, and elsewhere—as in Russia—the risk of politicized art merging into a fascist or “right-wing avant-garde” (*uha no avangyarudo*) demands reconsideration of modernism’s intimate relationship to nationalism and the political field as the logical culmination of the avant-garde’s project of merging art and life (Omuka 2003, 9). Nevertheless, whereas both Groys and Omuka place emphasis on this convergence’s potentially disastrous results, I prefer to stress the positive integer in what Omuka (2003, 10) calls the avant-garde’s “progressive/reactionary dualism” (*shinpoteki-handōteki nigenron*) by suggesting that the 1937 exhibition’s juxtaposition of Soviet and Japanese modernisms leaves open a space for reclaiming a progressive identity between art and politics, one that hesitates to too quickly equate politicization with totalitarianism.

A number of interventions, of which 1937 is a part, have since unsettled the opposition between politicized and autonomous Japanese art. These include the Art Gallery of New South Wales’s 1998 exhibition *Modern Boy, Modern Girl: Modernity in Japanese Art, 1910–1935*, which puts into conversation Japan’s emerging popular youth culture, experimental arts, and proletarian aesthetics;⁶ the Niigata Museum of Modern Art’s 2005 exhibition on politically “committed art” (*mokuteki geijutsu*), *Shōwa Art until 1945: The Path of “Committed Art”*

(*Shōwa no bijutsu 1945-nen made: Mokuteki Geijutsu no kiseki ten zuroku*) (Niigata 2005); and Japanese avant-garde and popular culture scholar Adachi Gen's 2012 text *Memes of the Japanese Avant-Garde: From Anarchism to Postwar Art* (*Zen'ei no idenshi: Anakizumu kara sengo bijutsu e*), which reads the anarchism of Taishō and early Shōwa-era Japanese experimental artists such as the MAVO group alongside the art of their bourgeois contemporaries under the shared umbrella of the avant-garde. Adachi's reading is echoed in the European case by what early twentieth-century European art historian Patricia Leighton (2013) calls the "liberation of painting" through the cross-pollination between late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Parisian modernism and anarchism. Further, Japanese literature scholar Brian Bergstrom writes how the "messy, needy bodies" of 1930s-era woman novelist Nakamoto Takako "push proletarian and New Sensationist regimes of representation to their limit" (2006, 314), illuminating the overlaps between these two categories. Similarly, Japanese proletarian literature scholar Mariko Shigeta Schimmel (2006) names Japanese modernism and proletarian literature "estranged twins of revolution," given their respective proximity to projects of modernization.

Works addressing the complex relationship between Japanese modernism, fascism, and imperialism include Hayama's own 2013 exhibition, *War/Art 1940–1950: Sequences and Transformations of Modernism* (*Senso/bijutsu 1940–1950: Modanizumu no rensa to henyō*), which spans art production during the war years and the immediate aftermath;⁷ the Kyoto Museum of Modern Art's 2010 exhibition of Japanese-style traditional paintings (*nihonga*) within the context of world war, *The Avant-Garde of Nihonga, 1938–1949* ("*Nihonga*" *no zen'ei, 1938–1949*); the traveling exhibition *Korean and Japanese Modern Artists in the Korean Peninsula, 1890s to 1960s* (*Nikkan kindai bijutsuka no manazashi*), first featured at the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum in 2015 (Fukuoka et al. 2015), which scrutinizes the complex relationships between Japanese and Korean artists preceding and following the colonial period (1910–1945);⁸ and Japanese art historian Asato Ikeda's scholarship (2012, 2016, 2018) on wartime Japanese art, and in particular what she calls the "link between wartime state politics and 'peaceful-looking' Japanese-style paintings" in Yasuda Yukihiro's *nihonga*, thereby demonstrating the subtle and intimate ways wartime ideologies permeate civilian life and modernist practice (Ikeda 2016). This recent literature and curatorial direction corroborates Fredric Jameson's (2012) account of

how the “ideology” of autonomous modernism detached from political engagement was introduced only retroactively, in the wake of World War II, flattening and rebranding the diverse and overlapping avant-garde activities of the interwar period not only in Europe but in Japan and its empire as well.

1937/1937

Without meaning to claim a decisive break with these recent reappraisals, out of which *1937* organically sprouts, I suggest here that the exhibition makes an original contribution in the following ways. First is the particularity of the exhibition’s international scope, bringing together both French surrealism and Soviet constructivism to demonstrate the political currents running within Japanese art circles as well as crossing national borders, producing new, if sometimes sporadic and short-lived, dialogues and solidarities in a global avant-garde milieu. Curator Asaki Yuka’s essay in the exhibition brochure explores these exchanges in more detail, tracing the epistolary correspondence (in manuscripts, photographs, and other documents) between French and Japanese surrealists, including that between Man Ray and Takiguchi Shuzo, as well as the diverse international participation in the *Overseas Surrealist Works Exhibition (Kaigai chōgenshitsu shugi sakuhin ten)* held in Japan in June and July 1937. Asaki describes how Takiguchi, in a 1941 essay, tellingly “posed the question of a connection between international communism and surrealism, and was thereby arrested and placed in custody by the Special Higher Police on suspicion of violating the Peace Preservation Law” (Asaki 2017, 4).

Certainly, a globally oriented retrospection on Japanese modernism is not new; for example, the 2006 exhibition *Tokyo-Berlin, Berlin-Tokyo* at the Mori Art Museum (Elliott et al. 2006) specifically took up the profuse exchanges between Germany and Japan in the interwar period, of which Murayama Tomoyoshi, the prominent avant-garde and proletarian designer included in *1937*, was one of the beneficiaries. And although Japanese literature scholar Tsuyoshi Namigata describes the global dimensions of 1930s Japanese literary modernism as a “process of translating Western exoticisms into a Japanese context” (2016, 207), by which Japanese writers internalized and reproduced the European Orientalist perspectives toward Asia and Africa, I am interested in how *1937* emphasizes a specifically political relationship between the Soviet and Japanese avant-gardes, which may resist such exoticization and the imperialist

tenets that undergird it, hereafter leaving aside the equally fruitful correspondence between Western and Japanese surrealists.

The connection with Soviet Russia in the 1930s also departs from the often-acknowledged influence of the early Russian futurists in Japan in the 1920s by instead giving explicit attention to Japan's revolutionary coevalness with the Soviet Union, situated on the cusp of proletarian liberation.⁹ I contend that this departure endures even in light of the exhibition's even-handed treatment of Soviet propaganda and Stalinist terror. The exhibition's unique global aperture, then, has significant implications for my reading of the decade's avant-garde practice through Japan intellectual historian Harry Harootunian's insight that "Modernism [is] the historical watermark of uneven development" (2000, xxi), since Japanese modernization cannot be understood apart from the transnational political-economic forces shaping the hierarchized contours of the globe in the Great Depression era, and with it, the differentiated formation and diffusion of modern art.

Second, I find that the exhibition's concentration of influential artists together in the same gallery space provides an exceptionally rich and comprehensive distillation of Japanese modern art's various intersecting currents, which alone make it deserving of attention with respect to other recent investigations of similar problematics. This is especially remarkable given that the paintings in the first gallery are selected entirely from the museum's own robust collection. I include here several close readings of the exhibition's carefully selected works that have hitherto received scant attention in English-language scholarship and that make available for analysis a wide range of thematic and formal concerns of relevance to the historiography of modern Japan. In this way, I hope to make a novel contribution to the literature on interwar Japanese modernism. My occasional references to other important pieces by some of the featured artists not included in the exhibition serve to accentuate this inclusive sampling of representative modernist artists by providing a wider foil for the claims I am making about the centrality of the exhibition's contents within what Japan historian John Dower has called "the Brittle Decade" (Dower et al. (2012). Thus, this reading takes advantage of the radiant aesthetic constellation the exhibition sets in motion and highlights the extent to which the featured artists contributed to the formation of a broader Japanese modernist movement.

Finally, and most importantly, I have chosen to situate this exhibition as a fulcrum for the competing pressures of history and politics in Japan and beyond, on the one hand, and artistic responses, on the other, due to the exhibition's own creative framing of the watershed year of 1937 as a kind of temporal nexus through which the decade's competing tendencies can be reassessed. By examining this single year, we may better understand the complex and competing historical currents at work in Japan and abroad through their varied cultural and aesthetic responses coming to a head in the late 1930s—what Mizusawa describes as 1937's actualization (*kenzaika*) of the confrontation (*tairitsu*) between opposing ideologies (2017, 1).

The year 1937 is pivotal in East Asian history partly because of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, in which a skirmish between the Japanese Kwantung Army and Chinese militants in Manchuria provided a pretense for full-scale invasion of China, marking the start of World War II in Asia (much of Northeast China was already under Japanese control through the puppet state of Manchukuo, established in 1932, whereas Taiwan and Korea had been formally incorporated as Japanese territories in 1895 and 1910). The year also points to a period when explicit statements of opposition to Japan's militarism at home became nearly impossible through both a regime of severe censorship and an effective system of forced conversion away from antigovernment activities (*tenkō*), signaling the demise of not only the proletarian cultural movement but also critically oriented artistic experimentation and modernist innovation.¹⁰ Japanese art historian Bert Winther-Tamaki labels this the thirties-era Japanese avant-garde's "withering autonomy," as, he observes, "the oppressive regime and social climate arrested these tendencies and by about 1940 most abstract and surrealist paintings fell from public view" (2012b, 129).

At the same time, as Mizusawa concludes, the year marks a moment of possibility (*kanōsei*) and brilliance (*kagayaki*) for aspiring modernist artistic production (2017, 2). Thus, by singling out this particular year, but not in the sense that conventional historians substitute monumental dates for larger structural processes, the exhibition conjures something akin to German philosopher Walter Benjamin's "dialectical image" as a means by which "to discover in the analysis of the small individual moment the crystal of the total event" (1999, 461). That is, viewing the 1930s retrospectively through the tipping point of 1937 allows us to revisit anew the historical totality of what *did* happen through the possibilities presented by what *could have*

happened before *and* after. In this way, we may better appreciate Japanese history's multiple, divergent paths rather than seeing the history unfold in an inexorable temporal progression in which the victory of fascism was preordained or inevitable. 1937//1937, the historical record as well as the exhibition, together demand a more nuanced, non-teleological understanding of the role of Japanese aesthetics and public culture in both the emergence of—à la revisionist Japanese historian Yoshiaki Yoshimi's "grassroots fascism" (2016)—and resistance to imperialism and totalitarianism.

In Japan and its colonies, 1937 represented something of a last hurrah for a vibrant modernist counterculture, witnessing the publication and/or exhibition of a number of monumental works that, due to the encroaching surveillance and censorship of the Pacific War years, would not be matched until the postwar era when Japan began to recover from wartime devastation. This transition may best be encapsulated in the distance between designer and painter Yanase Masamu's iconic 1927 poster in the *Proletarian Newspaper* (*Musansha shinbun*)—with a red communist hand extending out to greet the worker-reader in what Japanese and Korean proletarian literature scholar Samuel Perry describes as “a gesture of solidarity, strength, and reassurance” (2014, 1)—and his sentimental *Still Life (Lily)* (*Seibutsu (Yuri)*) of 1936 featured in this exhibition, or, further, his 1938 painting *Twilight (Hakubo)* (not included) of Mount Fuji at dusk, employing what was at the time perhaps the cornerstone graphic vocabulary in what Japanese literature and popular culture scholar Alan Tansman (2009) calls “the aesthetics of Japanese fascism.”¹¹

Japanese Modernism and Total War

I begin my discussion of works displayed in 1937 and their approximation of wider social forces, whether as indices of socioeconomic processes and shifts or as critical rejoinders to their historical moment, with Murai Masanari's 1937 *Urban (Uruban)*, the centerpiece of the exhibition (figure 1). The painting employs a De Stijl-like geometric abstraction and Mondrian-esque interplay of primary colors to formalize the urban planning of the 1930s-era modern metropolis evoked by the painting's title. This formalism is, however, as noted in Mizusawa's introductory essay in the brochure, inseparable from the military situation across the Tsushima/Korea Strait on the continent. Revealingly, Mizusawa compares the abstract painting

(*chūshōga*) to an “aerial photograph [*kōkū shashin*] overlooking a city on the map of what was then Inner Mongolia in China” (2017, 1). He thus refers to *Urban* with the neologism “aerial painting” (*kōkū kaiga*). In this way, he observes, aerial perspective is inextricable from the “newfound experience of space” (*aratana shikaku taiken*) formalized in Italian futurism with the World War I introduction of the fighter plane (*sentōki*), the Japanese manufacture of which first saw action over the Chinese continent (*Chūkoku tairiku*).

That Manchukuo, Japan’s puppet state in Manchuria, represented a laboratory for modernist architecture and urban planning is consequently not too far from Murai’s abstract rendition of a city blueprint, raising an interesting art historical question about the extent to which pure abstraction remains a kind of figuration available to content analysis.¹² However, the focal point of the painting, an oval-shaped figure in the lower right framed by five discontinuous, curving lines, can be said to resemble cultures under a microscope much as it resembles a study in urban design akin to the slide-like city structures of El Lissitzky’s *Proun* series.¹³ After all, it is no secret that these two modern scientific trends complement each other. Might we suggest, then, that this painting’s insinuation of the advanced state of medicine in Tokyo hospitals in the 1930s also bears some relation to, say, the medical experiments in bacteriological warfare conducted on live Chinese prisoners in Manchuria by the infamous Kwantung Army Unit 731, just as it cross-references the state-of-the-art, total social planning of Manchukuo?¹⁴

The two interweaving, vein-like tubular membranes running across the top of the painting, in respective white and red hues contrasting with the wide, rich blue background, strengthen this association with medical, alongside social-scientific, knowledge. Murai’s companion painting of 1940, *Village*, not shown in this exhibition, features a composition strikingly similar to that of *Urban* but with a blood-red background in contrast to the latter’s blue, which further accentuates the convergence between medical and architectural forms of biopolitical control. Nevertheless, as in Diego Rivera’s now-lost 1934 *Man at the Crossroads* mural, whose intersecting slides magnify humanity’s potential to “control the universe” and parallel the Hayama exhibition’s dialectical understanding of modernism’s diverging branch point by recasting impartial scientific knowledge as a political struggle between progressive and reactionary forces, Murai’s approach need not only be read as symptomatic of the dark side of modernism exclusively. In his paintings,

the choice as to which mode of social planning should win out—collectivization or fascism—remains open.



Figure 3. Chokai Seiji, *Landscape with a Trench*, 1937. Oil on canvas, 78.5 x 97 cm. ©The Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura and Hayama. Used with permission.

Another highlight of the collection similarly speaks to this confluence of modernism and wartime conditions: Chokai Seiji's *Landscape with a Trench* (*Zangō no are fukei*, figure 3). This 1937 painting anticipates the rugged abstractionism of the postwar Art Informel movement with its dark, nearly monochromatic palette and its coarse, scabby surface produced through layered encrustations of oil paint. Yet the titular, earthy gash across the center of the work violates the otherwise remote detachment of pure abstraction with the intervention of history—trenches (*zangō*) on battlefields across the Asian continent. Here the incision can be understood not only figuratively, as pictorially adumbrating a battle trench, but as literally sculpting such a landmark on the surface of the canvas itself. Chokai's painting shares a corner with the similarly bleak

Standing Young Man (*Seinen ritsuzō*, 1936, figure 4) by Hara Seiichi, as if to suggest that the artist-individual is not isolated from these wider sociopolitical contingencies. Hara's deep shades of brown, red, and black are enough to convey the despair under conditions of total war. Here Hara would appear to meet Winther-Tamaki's criteria for the "internal emigré," a term he borrows from Ben-Ami Shillony (1981) to refer to the wartime nonconforming painters whose corporeal selfhood was stifled but externalized and "embodied in the[ir] self-portraits" so as to preserve some individuality in the face of warmongering art characterized by a transcendental "disembodiment" (Winther-Tamaki 2012a, 125).



Figure 4. Hara Seiichi, *Standing Young Man*, 1936. Oil on canvas, 143.7 x 95.3 cm. ©The Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura and Hayama.¹⁵ Used with permission.

Likewise, the strong, confident pose of the central artist-figure, with his left shoulder tilted upward, is angled just a few degrees past comfortable equilibrium, heightening the painting's disorienting effect, just as the expressionistic strokes unsettle the coherence of the self by threatening to dissolve the subject into the similarly shaded background. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the painting's lower-left midsection, wherein the man's right hand, holding what appears to be a paintbrush matched by a palette in his left, merges with the surrounding skin-toned beige strokes, thus intimating fascism's encroachment on logos and the communicative individual by disrupting the opposition between subjective figure and objective ground. Interestingly, the region around the right hand also features the painting's highest protruding impasto, as if the relational gesture in the hand's metonymic act of painting itself escapes the two-dimensional illusionistic surface of the canvas and enters the gallery's real space. This might thereby inculcate the viewer in a shared historical continuum by metacritically asserting the political dimension lurking in any putatively autonomous modernist work.



Figure 5. Matsumoto Shunsuke, *Building*, 1935. Oil on paper mounted on plywood, 97 x 130 cm. ©The Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura and Hayama. Used with permission.

Matsumoto Shunsuke's 1935 *Building (Tatemono)*, figure 5) also announces the dangers posed to the civilian home front, in this case the anomie and alienation of urban social relations and spatial organization more broadly. The painting's gentle blue and beige tones are betrayed by the composition's crowding of rectangular forms describing the city apartment blocks, as the use of a frontal, rather than angled, viewpoint (with the exception of one receding building facade in the center buttressed with diagonal beams) almost abandons linear perspective altogether, forcing the subject to the painting's surface. On this point we may compare *Building* with the rhyming railway tracks and fence posts foreshortening perspective in Matsumoto's companion piece, *Near Yurakuchō Station (Yurakuchō eki fukin)*, 1936, not featured in the exhibition). Accordingly, Matsumoto's use of board and paper rather than canvas gives the painting a smoothness and sheen that forecloses the illusion of spatial recession and compresses linear distance to the sheer immediacy of texture, predating American painter Jasper John's tension between surface and depth, or between abstraction and iconography. The effect is to revoke the otherwise inviting function of housing complexes, gesturing to the reification of social life in 1930s Japan and, ultimately, of homelessness, the most extreme condition of surplus population. The viewer (who, according to the painting's widened perspective, must be plural) appears to stand before these buildings as would an unwelcome visitor or rejected tenant.

The manner in which the rectangular windows and echoing building edges cohere, as well as their merging with the board's planar surface more broadly, speaks, however, not only to capitalism's tearing asunder of immanent social relations but also to fascist totalitarianism's congealing of the body politic into a monad, the indivisible "mass ornament" described by Frankfurt School theorist Siegfried Kracauer (1995, 76). This architecture's tessellated quadrilaterals may also instantiate what Ikeda refers to as *Gleichschaltung*, or the "mechanically organized, regimented social space of forced homogeneity wherein the state asserts control over human subjects in an effort to wage a total war" (2012, 100). Ikeda locates this notion in the appearance of grid-like structures in various 1930s-era *nihonga* "machine-ist" (*kikaiishugi*) paintings and the rationalization and wartime domination they invoke, thereby demonstrating the hypermodernity, rather than backwardness, of fascist governmentality.

The urgency conveyed with hurried, thinly sketched lines in Matsumoto's 1937 *Talking on the Street (Tachibanashi)*, figure 6), also featured in the exhibition, similarly expresses how

wider political forces sweep through civilian streets under wartime conditions. A brief glance at Matsumoto's body of work, which was given a retrospective at Hayama in 2012, quickly reveals his preoccupation with the grim realities of wartime Japan and urbanization, given the preponderance of factories, buildings, bridges, railways, and other industrial infrastructures depicted in somber tones, mostly devoid of distinguishable human subjects, articulating what Polish-Jewish Marxist Rosa Luxemburg called, just prior to World War I, the production of "means of warfare," an accumulation of machinery necessary for mounting imperialist war (hence antimilitarists' renditions of technological warfare as overpowering and dehumanizing the organic human body) (Hudis and Le Blanc 2015).¹⁶



Figure 6. Matsumoto Shunsuke, *Talking on the Street*, 1937. Oil on canvas, 29.2 x 23.8 cm. ©The Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura and Hayama. Used with permission.

For this reason, art historian Maki Kaneko identifies Matsumoto as a “lone protestor” against Japan’s militarization, recounting influential art historian Hijikata Teiichi’s appraisal of his works “as an expression of the desperation and isolation that resulted from his lone protest in the increasingly militarized society” (Kaneko 2015, 146).¹⁷ Avant-garde Japanese art scholar Kozawa Setsuko (2004) has also written about Matsumoto’s avant-garde painting in the context of his “personal experience of war” (*sensō taiken*). In similarly biographical terms, art historian Mark H. Sandler recounts how Matsumoto’s was “the only voice raised in public protest against the army” in his lone critical response to a 1940 military symposium on the responsibility of artists to promote the war effort, titled “The Living Artist” (“Ikite iru gaka”) and published in the art journal *Mizue* in April 1941 (Sandler 1996, 78). Furthermore, the fact that Matsumoto’s aesthetic does not change drastically before or after the Pacific War is alone evidence for a conception of total war that colonizes the present, merging peace into wartime as a permanent state of emergency, much like fellow protestor Bertolt Brecht’s haunting lines from his World War II-era “German War Primer” (“Deutsch Kriegsfiel”):

THOSE AT THE TOP SAY: PEACE
AND WAR

Are of different substance.
But their peace and their war
Are like wind and storm.

War grows from their peace
Like son from his mother
He bears
Her frightful features.

Their war kills
Whatever their peace
Has left over.¹⁸

Capital’s Peripheries

Modernism’s relation to capitalism’s combined and uneven development becomes readily apparent when comparing side by side two additional works featured in the exhibition, Saka Soichi’s 1937 *Farming Implements* (*Nōgu*), which borrows from impressionism and pointillism to render a site of agricultural production, and Yoshihara Jiro’s 1936 *Work* (*Sakuhin*), an abstract

piece resembling a work from El Lissitzky's *Proun* series but with a more playful, organic curvature deviating from the rigid, cubic compositions of the latter. The Saka and Yoshihara works converge around the figure of the wheel, whose spokes suggest movement and generation—of agricultural produce, of electricity, of surplus value. In the pastoral setting of Saka's painting, the blurred description of the large pedaled reaping wheel, omitting or hastily describing the rotating spokes in a profuturist manner, invokes the crisis conditions of the Great Depression and the imperative for accelerated production in times of war.

Such an interpretation might even be stretched to read this acceleration as an allegory for imperial Japan's predatory dependency on colonial Korea to sustain its rice basket, continuing from the early days of annexation of the peninsula in 1910 through the war years. The contrast between the dryness of the tans and grays of past-ripe grain stalks and the fertile green of those yet to be harvested in Saka's painting corresponds to the wider historical dialectic between depression and surplus reaching a fever pitch in 1937, a crisis that could only be resolved through either the destruction of value itself with communism or the preservation of class society with imperialist war, the latter of which Walter Benjamin described a year prior as the sole means "to mobilize all of today's technical resources while maintaining the property system" (Eiland and Jennings 2002, 121).

On the one hand, we could say that, because of Asia's belated industrial development and limited involvement in World War I, the year 1937, rather than 1917, constitutes its "vortex"—a term Hugh Kenner (1971, 146) takes from Ezra Pound to describe Pound's European avant-garde milieu in the thick of World War I—the swallowing of divergent trends in the dizzying gravity of global class conflict. On the other hand, the thin spokes in Yoshihara's painting, mediating the gyroscope-like assemblage of various geometric shapes qua social building blocks rendered in a palette of gray, red, and black, similar to El Lissitzky's iconic 1923 *New Man*, might intimate the opposite situation, the movement toward collectivization and the globe-turning power of the proletariat, the literal definition of the active term "revolution."

Yoshihara is perhaps better known for his involvement with the Japanese avant-garde in the postwar period, as a founder of the influential group Gutai ("concrete") and author of its first manifesto. Gutai, it should be mentioned, put Japanese modernism on the map in the international context of 1950s abstract expressionism, after the West had for too long been

absorbed solely in Orientalist exoticization of Japan's ukiyo-e woodblock prints or traditional *nihonga* ink paintings. As many critics have noted, the former's broad planes of color themselves had a decisive influence on European modernism, particularly on Claude Monet's and Vincent Van Gogh's impressionisms, just as traditional African masks were devalued into raw material for Pablo Picasso's early cubism. About this unequal cultural reception and utter neglect of contemporaneous Japanese modernism, avant-garde Japanese literature scholar William O. Gardner writes that "the influence of Japanese culture on the European avant-garde was almost exclusively limited to premodern cultural elements—a structure of exchange familiar to readers of Said's *Orientalism*" (1999, par. 1).

But, as is clear from this exhibition, Yoshihara had been a leading participant in prewar modernism as well. Although not included in *1937*, his 1931 *Man Holding a Rope* (*Nawa o matō otoko*) contributes to the discussion of uneven development by registering mechanization and industry metonymically with the modern diving mask and hose, in addition to the oppression of the peasantry and nonindustrial labor, as the mask apparatus and rope entangling the man's shoulders and upper torso becomes a cyborg appendage of his body itself. The bright palette of the rope's yellows and browns and the fluffy cream clouds against a soft blue sky give the painting a somewhat playful, idyllic atmosphere. Yet the unusual and ultimately contorted figuration, with the man's left leg positioned much too far out of proportion to align with what would be his left shoulder due to the weight and literal oppression of the heft of rope, as well as the anonymity imposed by the drone-like mask eyelets, allow us to recognize modernism's integration with the commodity form's degradation of human bodies even as the composition's qualities exhibit a certain humorous caricature.

The possibility that the Red Decade of the 1930s could overcome capitalism's uneven development through communization rather than imperialist world war is insinuated by V.A. Favorsky's cover photograph for the February 1937 issue of the graphic magazine *USSR in Construction*, with its denoted incorporation of Tadjik hinterlands into the Soviet sphere of influence. Whether or not this was actually accomplished in the Soviet Union—as opposed to merely providing exotic fodder for propaganda purposes or entailing the actual subjugation and marginalization of ethnic non-Russians by the Stalinist state—is, of course, open to interpretation. But the exhibition's inclusion of these various Japanese modernists, together with veterans of the

Soviet avant-garde, speaks to the problem of combined, differential trajectories of development in the global capitalist economy and the potential for economically backward nations like Russia and Japan, in contrast to the “stagist” model, to “skip...over intermediate steps of capitalist development,” per Leon Trotsky’s theory of combined and uneven development (2008, 4), which laid the groundwork for his defense of “permanent revolution” (2010).

We will remember that imperial Russia was Meiji Japan’s most formidable neighboring enemy, with whom it competed for influence on the Asian continent until Japan’s decisive victory in the 1905 Russo-Japanese War, and, paradoxically, became the central beacon for the Japanese proletarian movement after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. As historian of Japan Tatiana Linkhoveva (2017) reminds us, Soviet Russia also viewed Japan ambivalently, as both a formidable imperialist threat in the Far East and simultaneously a very likely site for a workers’ revolution.

Asaki Yuka’s timely curatorial decision to include images and materials from the Soviet documentary propaganda magazine *USSR in Construction* in an exhibition held precisely one hundred years after the October Revolution helps us rethink the situation of the Soviet avant-garde, and politically committed modernisms more broadly, outside the Cold War-informed rejections of Soviet art after 1934, the year in which Soviet cultural policy director Andrei Zhdanov’s prescriptions for socialist realism became official party doctrine. If we consider that *USSR in Construction*, published from 1930 to 1941, featured works from an all-star cast of Russian avant-garde designers, including Es and El Lissitzky, Alexander Rodchenko, and Varvara Stepanova, and even featured the German emigrant John Heartfield’s innovative photomontage *Untitled (Lenin over Moscow)* in the September 1931 issue, the absolute break between an early Russian avant-garde and later Soviet socialist realism becomes more difficult to enforce. As the magazine series attests, in the media of photography and cinema, avant-garde techniques such as splicing and photomontage continued to be used even in state-sponsored propaganda works well into the 1930s.¹⁹

I say this, of course, with all due recognition of the real suppression and state violence used to contain and supersede the once-dynamic Soviet avant-garde. The Stalinist freeze of this era notwithstanding, the magazine continued to publish materials of relevance to the global proletariat everywhere, such as the following passage from Maxim Gorky’s 1901 play *Lower*

Depths, translated into English in the September 1939 issue dedicated to the “Fortieth Anniversary of the Moscow Art Theater,” a copy of which was on display at Hayama: “A lie justifies the load which crushes the hand of the worker...and condemns people to die of hunger.... That lie is the religion of slaves and masters.”²⁰

Nonetheless, despite the magazine’s propaganda function, as curator and Russian art scholar Momiyama Masao notes in his essay in the exhibition brochure, “Important national offices in the *USSR in Construction* editorial committee were eradicated before and after 1937 in the Great Purge [*dai shukusei*]” (2017, 6). Even Gorky himself was not spared this Stalinist terror. Momiyama goes on to demonstrate how Alexander Rodchenko and Varvara Stepanova’s photomontage, featuring proud statues of Lenin and Stalin on opposite banks of Moscow’s Volga River Canal from the cover of the February 1938 issue (figure 7), served to conceal (*inpai*) the atrocity (*gyakusatsu*) in which he claims as many as twenty-two thousand prison laborers perished over the course of the canal’s construction beginning in 1932. Like Momiyama, modern European art historian T. J. Clark is sensitive to the dangers of an avant-garde too readily committed to propagandistic unity with life; Clark reads one of El Lissitzky’s 1920 poster boards composed in the heat of Bolshevization as “show[ing] us the state shouting (as it usually does) through the revolution’s mouth” (1999, 297).



Figure 7. Alexander Rodchenko and Varvara Stepanova, *Moscow-Volga Canal with Sergei Merkulov’s Statues of Lenin and Stalin*. Source: *USSR in Construction*, February 1938. Ruki Matsumoto Collection, Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura and Hayama.

The very idea that the Soviet series could be included in an exhibition dedicated to modernism might then itself constitute “a slap in the face of public taste,” to borrow the provocative title of the 1912 Russian futurists’ manifesto, co-authored by David Birliuk, Alexander Kruchenykh, Vladimir Mayakovsky, and Victor Khlebnikov, each of whom would come to be influential not only in the Russian avant-garde but internationally.²¹ I merely wish to emphasize the uniqueness of the exhibition’s refusal of the tenacious split between modernism and realism in recognizing the Soviet proletarian movement, both before and after 1934, as belonging to global modernism, even if this at times lends support to what Clark calls “the horrors of modernization” (1999, 297).

The Soviet-Japanese connection pertains especially to the case of Murayama Tomoyoshi, a founding member of the Dadaist MAVO and later a champion of the proletarian cause, who contributed his artistic talents to the design of numerous propaganda posters, book covers, film and theater promotional materials, and other related documents, several of which were on display in the Hayama exhibition.²² Borrowing directly from Soviet constructivism, as Harry Harootunian has discussed, Murayama came to reject the autonomous location of art, thus indicting apolitical modernisms, and, like El Lissitzky, Boris Arvatov, and other constructivists, labored for a kind of practical avant-garde put to the use of the masses: “Productivism proclaims a complete war with pure art. It buries individualism in art and calls for the collective” (2000, 102).²³

In addition to a series of Murayama’s posters and scrapbooks, including a promotional poster he created for the premiere 1938 performance of the Korean traditional play *Ch’unhyangjŏn* (*The Tale of Ch’unhyang*) by the Shinkyō Theatrical Troupe under his direction,²⁴ the exhibition featured an excerpt from a March 1934 news article that featured photographs of those arrested in violation (*ihan*) of the Peace Preservation Law, including Murayama, the proletarian poet Nakano Shigeharu, and other members of the Japanese Communist Party.²⁵ Without belaboring the point, I contend that the exhibition’s inclusion of this event—one in a series of infamous police roundups of leftist activists that dealt what would amount to a death blow to the Japanese proletarian movement—as also portentous for Japanese modernism comes as a welcome reciprocal understanding of the two movements and the close proximity of their respective goals for a new, modernized, and liberated society.

Of similar interest to our discussion of imperialism and uneven development in relationship to Japanese modernism is painter Aimitsu's 1935 *Landscape of Manchuria (Manshū fukei)*, whose title and subject explicitly link the exhibition to the situation of the colonies, with its passive landscape reproduced in the gaze of the colonizer as a space ready to be conquered. Equally notable is the inclusion of Korean abstract painter Kim Whanki's 1937 drawing *Untitled (Jasbent) Illustration for Zakkicho (Mudai [Jasebento] Zakkicho no tameno genga)*, retroactively attributing, if only symbolically and not possibly rectifying historical events, a sort of coevalness to the colonized Korean, who may participate as a fellow modernist rather than being reduced to the primitive status of a traditionally costumed performer or having to display "local color" (J. *kyōdoshoku*, K. *hyangt'osaek*), as was heavily sanctioned by the colonial government through such mechanisms as the state-sponsored Chosŏn Art Exhibition (*Senten*), 1922–1944.²⁶

These, as well as a number of other works on display in 1937, factor the uneven incorporation of the periphery into capitalist relations, whether the colonies themselves or rural regions outside the metropolitan centers in Japan, such as socially committed woodblock artist Ueno Makoto's 1936 *Nursing in the Field (Hatake de obbai)*, portraying a roughly cut mother nursing her baby child against a farm backdrop. This work raises the question of gender and social reproduction, or its impossibility, under conditions of wartime destruction, since total war, which subsumes both enemy battlefield and civilian home front into a theater of action, allows for the possibility of reproduction for only a select few. For most, it entails Joseph Schumpeter's (1994) "creative destruction" in the most violent sense of the term—at once annihilating unprofitable machinery and male and female bodies as mere surplus populations.²⁷

Like the moving scene in feminist director Helma Sanders-Brahms' 1980 World War II film *Germany, Pale Mother (Deutschland, bleiche Mutter)* in which protagonist Lene gives birth in the midst of an Allied air raid on Berlin, total war reveals itself as entirely antagonistic to social reproduction, and dedicated to the reproduction of capital only in an abstract sense, as a form of credit. War instead makes way for cycles of capital accumulation in the future, whereas the present is sacrificed to this promissory note in the form of slaughter and devastation. Ueno's print, which precedes the era of full-scale combat by one year, can nevertheless be plausibly situated in the context of both the deprivation of the rural proletariat and the anticipation of the

fully gendered division of labor and violence of the Pacific War while tensions mounted on the Chinese mainland.

The prominent 1933 painting *Circus* (*Sākasu no kage*, figure 8) by the celebrated surrealist Koga Harue makes visible a very different kind of periphery, retrojectively positing what could be interpreted as a posthuman identification or even solidarity between the dispersed animal cast (eight tigers, a seal, a giraffe, an eagle, and an elephant) and the affective labor of the human circus crew. This identification is rendered formally with the superimposition of the painting's only man in parallel posture before one of three circus tigers together composing a pyramid, his spine forming a parallel with the tiger's extended front legs, as if to foreground the objectification of both performing human and nonhuman animals.



Figure 8. Koga Harue, *Circus*, 1933. Oil on canvas, 130 x 162 cm. © The Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura and Hayama. Used with permission.

The problem of marginalized, exploited, and peripheral labor also appears in Fujita Tsuguhara's 1934 watercolor *A Ding-Dong Party Bandman (a Workman and a Maid)* (*Chindonya shokunin to jyochū*), whose realistic figuration of two workers, a man and a woman seated side by side, conveys their similarly marginalized positions across the gendered division of labor. Fujita's rendition of their echoing bony and contorted hands speaks to the hardships of manual labor in their respective areas of expertise. The inclusion of such a realistic piece, clearly resonating with the populist zeitgeist of the Depression era, in an exhibition dedicated to 1930s modernism, works to diversify that category beyond its exclusive denotation of formal innovation alone so as to make room for works responding critically to the tumultuous conditions of economic crisis. In this way, the selection of Fujita and other figurative works validates comparative modernist literature scholar Jessica Berman's contention that "when we move beyond the European centers that are the source for most common Euro-American definitions of modernism, we will find a wider range of formal preoccupations as well as a broader set of attitudes toward modernity than those we are used to recognizing" (2011, 18–19).

Here I do not mean to propose a broadening of the category of modernism to the extent that it becomes conflated with modernity itself, such that any and all cultural products within the time period we categorize as *modern* may come to be defined as *modernist*, but rather to entertain the idea that such socially oriented realism might take its rightful place within an expanded field of modernist practice. Winther-Tamaki (2012a) and Japan art historian Aya Louisa McDonald (2012) have recounted how Fujita became arguably the most renowned of all the Japanese painters to collaborate with the war effort. Winther-Tamaki observes that "Fujita thrived on the war that the militarists had created; more than a tonic to his art, it was as though the conflict sparked a religious conversion giving new meaning to his whole artistic existence" (2012a, 129). McDonald similarly describes Fujita's war documentary paintings (*sensōga*) as an "attempt to create a new kind of quasi-religious icon—a Shinto icon in which the 'spirit bodies' (*shintai*) of the war dead are literally embodied in paintings" (2012, 170).

Fujita's later collaboration then raises the question posed at the outset by Omuka Toshiharu and Asato Ikeda concerning the extent to which total war already performs the overcoming of modernism and realism, or the suppression of autonomy in favor of politically committed works. However, unlike Murayama Tomoyoshi and other left-leaning avant-gardists,

in this case, Fujita's efforts work toward ends that are severely regressive rather than liberating. Nonetheless, it is worth reconsidering the institutional location of politically oriented realist artworks such as Fujita's *Ding-Dong Party*, which can be said to strive for public reception and positive social change rather than detached contemplation, at the very least encouraging a slight tweaking of Immanuel Kant's formulation of universal aesthetic experience as necessarily "disinterested" (2007, 44). We shouldn't forget that the first "modern" Western art movement to free itself from the institutional tutelage of the monarchy in the newfound bourgeois societies of the nineteenth century was, after all, the realism of Gustave Courbet and Édouard Manet, not impressionism or "modernism" as we commonly define the latter in formal terms. Accordingly, the unique juxtapositions and overall careful selection of works in the 1937 exhibition provide one potential direction for further investigation of the relationship between Japanese modernism and its realist other in the 1930s and after.

Conclusion: Modernism at a Crossroads

Uchida Iwao's 1937 *Port (Minato)*, figure 9) makes for a fine conclusion, though this painting was not positioned as such in the exhibition itself. Uchida became a prominent leftist painter in the postwar period, producing a number of significant works in a socialist realist style, including the 1948 *Voices Raised (Defenders of Culture)* (*Utageo yo okore [Bunka o mamoru hitobito]*), in which cultural workers bearing red flags look outside the canvas frame toward a new socialist future for Japan (informed by the then-recent establishment of North Korea and the ongoing civil war in China). Uchida's inclusion in 1937 is therefore exceptional insofar as he came in the 1930s to eschew and openly criticize abstraction and modernist trends in favor of a specifically Japanese inflection of realist oil painting (Kaneko 2012).

Despite Uchida's antimodernist theoretical inclinations and his shift toward realist portraiture exclusively in the early 1940s, however, *Port*'s large dimensions accentuate an almost eerie sense of desolation in a manner reminiscent of Italian artist Giorgio de Chirico's unpopulated streets; the port structures and buildings are viewed from atop a hill on which a group of children and a mother are gathered. The predominantly feminine, juvenile population negatively renders the conscription of young and older men alike toward the war effort through

their absence, with their departure at ports across Japan like that featured in *Port*, heading off to battlefields on the Asian mainland or in the South Pacific.



Figure 9. Uchida Iwao, *Port*, 1937. Oil on canvas, 182 x 226 cm. © The Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura and Hayama. Used with permission.

The abstraction of the port infrastructure and lack of definition in the building surfaces suggests the commercialization of public space more broadly, as this architecture itself could resemble economical shipping containers. In this way, the port presents an apt metonym for the symbiotic relationship between commerce and militarization reaching a near unity under fascism, as both commercial cargo and warships trafficked from these same ports. The formal division of the composition between the upper half (figuratively lower in altitude)—the masculine domain of imperialism—and the feminized or even infantilized private sphere grounded by the darkly shaded grass of the hilltop is revealing in another sense as well, a possible resistance to omnipresent militarism. On the left, the young girl standing tall, her face boldly turned toward that inaccessible public and violent world, is one indicator of such hope. Whereas the other children shy from the blinding force of a total politics of fascism, and even the mother can only stare across in both concern for and awe of her daughter, perpendicularly intersecting our gaze,

we look forward in parallel with this defiant young girl in opposition to the sexist, ageist, and militarist structure of capitalist modernity, out on both the branch point of 1937 and our own present—a “crossroads,” as Rosa Luxemburg once urgently put it, between “transition to Socialism” and “regression into Barbarism” (1916).

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Notes

- 1 Translated by Robert Thomas Tierney (2015, 170).
- 2 See the exhibition’s website at <http://www.moma.pref.kanagawa.jp/en/museum/exhibitions/2017/collection2/index.html>.
- 3 These surrealist textual exchanges are explained in more detail in the museum’s exhibition booklet (Museum of Modern Art 2017b), which includes biographical information on a number of Japanese and European artists with whom Yamanaka Tiroux (born Yamanaka Sansei) was in contact.
- 4 A very helpful and insightful overview of this period’s various factions, with emphases on surrealism as well as the split between the proletarian movement and various avant-gardes, can be found in Clark (1994). A more extensive discussion can be found in Clark (2013).
- 5 This context is surveyed in great detail by Gardner (2004), which also provides a substantial collection of translations of Hagiwara’s poems. For Hagiwara’s original groundbreaking 1926 collection, *Death Sentence (Shikei senkoku)*, see the reissued edition published by the Nihontoshō Center (Hagiwara [1926] 2012).
- 6 Refer to the exhibition catalogue, Ajioka and Menzies (1998).
- 7 See the exhibition’s website at http://www.moma.pref.kanagawa.jp/en/museum/exhibitions/2013/senso/index_en2013.html.
- 8 The Museum of Modern Art, Hayama, which this exhibition also visited, provides several images of and commentaries on featured paintings on the exhibition’s website (in Japanese) at <http://www.moma.pref.kanagawa.jp/museum/exhibitions/2015/nikkan/index.html>.
- 9 For an overview of the reception in Japan of Italian and Russian futurism in particular, see Omuka Toshiharu (2000, 2015), Tōkyō Shinbun (2002), and Ōishi Masahiko (2009). Poet and painter Kanbara Tai’s (1925) *Studies in Futurism (Miraiha kenkyū)* was the first

- full-length, substantial engagement with European futurism to be published in Japan and remains an essential text on this topic.
- 10 On imperial Japan's censorship policies more broadly, see Abel (2012). On *tenkō* in particular, see Hoston (1983) and Steinhoff (1988).
- 11 For more on Yanase's paintings and proletarian designs, see his (2013) four-volume set of complete works. The 1938 painting *Twilight* is available in the public domain at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Yanase_Masamu#/media/File:YanaseMasamu-1938-Twilight.png.
- 12 On Manchukuo as a laboratory for modernist social planning, see Denison and Ren (2017). On Japanese avant-garde propaganda in Manchukuo, see also Culver (2014). The essential English-language text on Manchukuo is Louise Young's *Japan's Total Empire* (1998).
- 13 The title of El Lissitzky's abstract painting series *Proun* likely meant "Project for the Affirmation of New Forms in Art," or Pro-UNOVIS, the latter being an acronym for the avant-garde art group centered in Vitebsk to which he and Kasimir Malevich belonged. See T. J. Clark (1999, 226, 231). See also the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) webpage at <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79040>.
- 14 For more on Unit 731 and other Japanese medical experiments during the war, see Nie et al. (2010).
- 15 Matsumoto's painting is also available in the public domain at https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/松本竣介#/media/File:MatsumotoShunsuke_Building_1935.png.
- 16 For Rosa Luxemburg's treatment of militarism in value terms, see chapter 32 ("Militarism in the Sphere of Capital Accumulation") in Hudis and Le Blanc (2015). For more on Matsumoto Shunsuke, refer to the exhibition catalogue from his 2012 retrospective (Kato et al. 2012). See also the Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura and Hayama's exhibition 2012 website: http://www.moma.pref.kanagawa.jp/en/museum/exhibitions/2012/shunsuke/index_en2012.html.
- 17 For more on Hijikata's activities as the founding assistant director of the progressive postwar Kamakura Museum of Modern Art, which includes the Hayama branch, as well as some of its institutional limitations, see Hein (2012).
- 18 This "German War Primer" is not to be confused with Brecht's 1955 collection under the same title, featuring separate poems providing biting, satirical captions for photographs Brecht collected during the war years. The poems included here come rather from Brecht's "Deutsch Kriegsfiel" series published in his 1939 collection *Svendborger Gedichte* (Svendborg poems). For this entire collection in the original German, see Brecht (2000, 204–210). The anonymous translations quoted here are found at <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/from-a-german-war-primer/>.
- 19 For more on the activities of these and other avant-garde European artists within the Soviet orbit, spanning the periods before and after 1934, see Witkovsky (2011, 25). My first exposure to Heartfield's image was through this source.
- 20 This passage appears near the beginning of Act IV in Gorky's play. A slightly different translation from that featured in the *USSR in Construction* issue quoted above can be found in Gorky (1959, 64).

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- 21 For a substantial collection of writings by Russian futurists, including the text of Biriuk et al., see Lawton and Eagle (2004).
- 22 For a nearly complete collection of Murayama's works included in the 2012 retrospective held at the Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura and Hayama, see Murayama Tomoyoshi Kenkyūkai (2012). Murayama figures prominently in Weisenfeld (2002) and is discussed in Silverberg (2006).
- 23 See Harootunian's section on Murayama, "Through the Prism of the Machine" (2000, 101–106). Silverberg notes that Murayama's "treatise on Constructivism reveals a crucial point of overlap between the modernist avant-garde and the consumer of the modern: a concern for *seikatsu*, a daily life made up of both repeated practice and popular innovations. Murayama contended that *seikatsu* was the primary problem for the present and that the 'priests of art' were preventing the creation of a new everyday. This constructivist saw art in the quotidian arrangement of objects in a room" (2006, 19). The ideal "consumer of the modern" for Murayama, of course, would be that of a socialist modernity, rather than capitalist consumerism.
- 24 Murayama's interest in colonial Korea and internationalist solidarity were well known. For important recent postcolonial discussions of his 1938 staging of the first Japanese-language version of the traditional Korean play whose script was composed by leftist writer and resident Korean Chang Hyök-chu, see Suh (2013), Kwon (2015), and Yi (2017). Suh notes how "the play itself was a text haunted by ambivalence" (2013, 55), in that it was well received in the context of Japan's contradictory assimilation policy of "Japan and Korea as one body" (*naisen ittai*) on both the Japanese right and left but derided by Korean critics for its infidelity to the original. On the matter of translating *Ch'unhyangjŏn* into Japanese, Suh proceeds to critique "the place of equal exchange in the conventional definition of translation," which "is also homologous with the strategy of colonial discourse" insofar as "colonial discourse never stops describing pairs placed in lopsided power relations as symmetrically reciprocal" (2013, 50).
- 25 For more on Nakano's communist activities alongside his poetry, see Silverberg (1990). For a recent reinterpretation of the Japanese proletarian movement as avant-garde, see Perry (2014).
- 26 For more on Korean "local color" in the context of state prescriptions and institutional sponsorship, see Kim (2005).
- 27 Saint-Amour's (2015) description of the situation of British modernism in the interwar period (1918–1939), marked by a "tense future" or sense of foreboding concerning the imminent eruption of war, could equally refer to the anxious condition of Ueno's painting as well as interwar Japanese modernism writ large.

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