

Asato Ikeda, *The Politics of Painting: Fascism and Japanese Art during the Second World War*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2018, 144 pp. 33 colour and 12 b/w illus. \$ 60.00 (hardcover) ISBN 9780824872120

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Volume 45, Number 1, 2020

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1070594ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1070594ar>

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Publisher(s)

UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada)

ISSN

0315-9906 (print)

1918-4778 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Nolte, V. (2020). Review of [Asato Ikeda, *The Politics of Painting: Fascism and Japanese Art during the Second World War*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2018, 144 pp. 33 colour and 12 b/w illus. \$ 60.00 (hardcover) ISBN 9780824872120]. *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 45(1), 99–101. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1070594ar>

Chapter Twenty-Four, “The Shifting Postwar Marketplace: Illustration in the US and Canada, 1940–1970”). Despite the toll it takes on specificity, the book’s far reach across subject areas is, I argue, to the benefit of readers, as it exposes them to a variety of methods and overlapping information, which helps to build understanding. There is some possibility of confusion, as the reader is presented with a great many examples of what “illustration” is and can be, and this fluidity is especially obvious later in the book when the discussion, I would suggest, becomes about illustration and graphic design simultaneously, although in some chapters this slip and the debate it has generated is acknowledged (Chapter Nineteen) while, elsewhere, the relationships with other fields is drawn out (Chapter Twenty on art versus craft, art versus messaging). In Chapters Nine and Ten there is a return to the original definition presented in the introduction, which provides some clarity as the book progresses.

This is a much-needed volume and my hope is that it inspires more writing in the field. The forthcoming *Illustration Research Methods* by Rachel Gannon and Mireille Fauchon (due September 2020 from Bloomsbury) promises to be an excellent start. The editors of *History of Illustration* are to be applauded; it is heartening to see such a strong contribution to the maturation of the field. ¶

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1. Maziar Raein, “Integration of studio and theory in the teaching of graphic design,” in *Art, Design & Communication in Higher Education* 3, no. 3 (December 2004); Elkins (1995) in Erk, Selen, and Wilson, “Teaching Art History to Design Students,” *The International Journal of the Humanities* 5, no. 7 (2007).

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Renowned modern painter and Japanese nationalist Uemura Shōen’s 1939 painting *Sudden Blast* (*Kaze*) pictures a woman wearing an elegant, bright blue kimono. Her body leans forward as she moves to the right of the frame. Slightly bowing her head, she protects her hair with her left hand while her right hand modestly gathers a part of her garment, revealing her footwear (*geta*). Though the painting does not depict the explicitly militaristic subject matter one might find in official War Campaign Record Paintings (*Sensō sakusen kirokuga*), its message is still political. *Bijin-ga*, or paintings of beautiful women, are a popular genre of Japanese art that can be traced back to the Nara period (710–784). In the early twentieth century, *bijin-ga* were criticized for upholding beauty standards and social expectations of women that no longer reflected their modern status. Many modern Japanese-style painters subverted this genre by depicting unconventional subject matter, such as working-class women or those with physical maladies. Shōen,¹ in contrast, sought to reclaim the artistic legacy of *bijin-ga* as a method for re-articulating Japan’s traditional culture. Relating to this genre’s history of representing and actively constituting idealized aesthetic and moral standards, Shōen’s female subjects affirm their wartime gender roles and closely align with prevailing discourses in the 1930s and 1940s that centred on cultural nationalism (73). Like much of her work, *Sudden Blast*



codifies beautiful women as figures of traditional Japan. When examined within the wider scope of Japan’s wartime artistic output, the painting reflects the many ways in which fascism operated as state ideology that paradoxically both rejected and embraced modernity (24).

Seemingly apolitical paintings are the focus of Asato Ikeda’s book *The Politics of Painting: Fascism and Japanese Art during the Second World War*. As Ikeda reveals, apolitical subject matter played a key role in contributing to the moral education of Japanese citizens during wartime in a way similar to how battle paintings were used to instill national pride (67). Seeking to reframe the study of non-militaristic paintings through the lens of fascism, Ikeda makes a significant contribution to scholarship on Japanese art in the twentieth century, bringing to light issues in the history of art that are often left unexamined. While there exists a substantial body of scholarly literature on topics in the history of modern art in Japan, most scholarship in English focuses exclusively on the pre- and post-war decades (for example, see Conant 1995; Foxwell 2015; Munro 1994; Rimer 2011; Tiampo 2011; Tomii 2016; Weston 2004; Weisenfeld 2002; and Winther-Tamaki 2012, among others). Further, the limited Japanese scholarship on wartime art focuses overwhelmingly on Western-style (*yōga*) War Campaign Record Paintings, whose subject matter is overtly political. Artists were commissioned

by the government to produce propaganda paintings or images that would document key victories and events. While there was no expressly preferred artistic style for artworks made in service to Japan's war effort, the naturalistic treatment of subject matter in *yōga* was often desired because it could effectively propagate the state's wartime message. Large-scale oil paintings depicting violent battle scenes were typically displayed in public exhibitions and reproduced and disseminated to the populace (2). This body of work has never been exhibited in its entirety, a decision that, on the one hand, spares perpetuating the trauma of Imperial Japan's war efforts, while, on the other hand, reflects the Japanese government's reluctance to come to terms with its history of violence.² Official war paintings have left a troubling legacy while non-militaristic paintings have gone relatively unexamined. Challenging the binary produced between the "problematic" Western-style official War Campaign Record Paintings and the "unproblematic" Japanese-style (*nihonga*) paintings of landscapes, historical figures and events, beautiful women, and folk scenes, Ikeda reveals the complicated relationships between art and the state, demonstrating how modern art was central to the nation's efforts to bolster its fascist ideology. By specifically analyzing non-militaristic paintings, the book widens the scope of what subject matter constitutes "war art" and further shifts studies of art and the Second World War beyond a Western-centric focus.

The first chapter of the book is concerned with framing fascism and cultural nationalism within discourses on modern art in Japan. As Ikeda explains, "if fascism is the ideology that reclaims a country's cultural authenticity in an attempt to resist a homogenizing modernity, then cultural production is indeed central to maintaining its politics" (12). During

the Second World War, the Japanese government cultivated a vision of the nation's shared cultural and ethnic roots as a means to both bolster its history and to establish the cultural superiority of Japanese traditions that would be used to justify wartime violence and an imperializing agenda in East and Southeast Asia. This vision was a direct response to earlier periods of modernization in Japan, particularly as a rejection of the policies of the Meiji period (1868–1912), when officials supported the adoption of Western philosophies, technologies, and modes of commerce, and promoted European art through state-supported art academies as a means to build up Japanese culture to rival the West. Like the ideologies of its Axis allies—Nazi Germany and Mussolini's Italy—Japanese fascism was a reaction against what wartime officials perceived as a cultural crisis. The crisis was that, under the guidance of Meiji officials, the adoption of a modernizing scheme centred on Western values, such as liberalism, individualism, and capitalism, had alienated individuals and fragmented community. Wartime officials believed this would eventually lead to the loss of a traditional Japanese way of life (15).

Ikeda argues that fascism was a reactionary form of cultural nationalism and modernity and it pervaded Japanese national policy during the Second World War. This understanding informs her methodology for analyzing the ways in which non-militaristic artworks functioned within the overlapping social, political, and cultural contexts of the war. Chapters Two, Three, Four, and Five see this methodology in practice as they focus on specific artist case studies. Acknowledging that there is no singular "fascist aesthetic," Ikeda expands her visual analyses by attending to the social lives of the artworks examined in each chapter, locating where they were displayed and who their intended audiences were, examining how they were discussed both in the Japanese media and by the artists, and

tracing the ways in which the artists participated in Japan's war effort. The artists examined in the book were all active in a vibrant landscape of modern art that at times rejected tradition or sought to innovate it. They willingly collaborated with the Japanese government, which had, by the 1930s, mandated that artworks must be made to express Japan's cultural authenticity. Ikeda acknowledges the complexities involved with the artists' participation as active agents in wartime culture. Emphasizing the social lives of their work, she nuances the study of style and tradition, which have been the chief means of studying modern art in Japan. For example, in Chapter Two Ikeda focuses on Yokoyama Taikan's paintings of Mount Fuji, arguing that the ways in which they "manifest Japanese fascism" are not based solely on the subject matter or the style in which Taikan worked (24). Rather, nationalist discourse surrounding traditional images of Mount Fuji as well as the state's promotion of Japanese landscape paintings amongst its international allies (a state-sponsored exhibition of Japanese landscape paintings was organized in Berlin in 1939) facilitated resonances between Fuji and fascism. Additionally, Ikeda notes Taikan's active participation in the nation's war efforts. His paintings represented Japan on an international stage and the artist notably gave a lecture on Japanese-style painting to a group of Hitler Youth visiting Japan in 1938 (46).

By highlighting the socio-political contexts in which non-militaristic war paintings were created and circulated, Ikeda pinpoints the multiple aesthetic strategies of Japanese modernism. This is vitally important for any study of the interconnections between modern art and the nation in the context of twentieth-century Asia because it resists the easy bifurcation between Asian "tradition" and Western "avant-gardism." Ikeda demonstrates that the impetus to either adopt, re-interpret, or reject traditional cultural practices as aesthetic strategies

had deeply political implications in Imperial Japan. These implications were further rooted in already existing discourse concerning the need to develop a national style of painting that would express Japan's modernity and cultural authenticity.

While chapters Two, Three, and Four focus on artists who took up more traditional mediums and styles in their works (Chapter Two focuses on Taikan's Mount Fuji paintings, Chapter Three examines a folding screen painting by Yasuda Yukihiko that evokes the historical subject matter and style of medieval *yamato-e* paintings, and Chapter Four examines Shōen's modern *bijin-ga*), Chapter Five further breaks down the binaries between Western-style (*yōga*) battle paintings and modern Japanese-style (*nihonga*) non-militaristic paintings by examining the work of Fujita Tsuguharu, an artist who worked in the *yōga* style. During the war, Fujita was commissioned to produce both large-scale battle paintings and non-militaristic paintings. The focus of Ikeda's analysis is *Events in Akita* (1937), a monumental oil painting depicting scenes from four seasonal festivals in Akita, a northern prefecture on Japan's largest island, Honshū. *Events in Akita* evokes both the change of seasons and the tranquility of life in what was considered a rural periphery at the time. As Ikeda explains, Western-style painters were able to evoke Japanese subject matter in service to state ideology (99). Fujita's treatment of the subject of seasonal change and rural life (which are common subject matter found throughout the history of art in Japan) promoted Japanese colonialism, expressing that the roots of Japan's national identity were located in the cultural traditions of its peripheries. During the 1930s, Akita and the rest of the northern Tohoku region was seen as the least modernized part of the country and therefore the most traditionally and authentically "Japanese." Fujita's painting, along with other cultural works about Tohoku, produced a primitivist gaze

that celebrated the Otherness of rural subjects untouched by modernization and Westernization. This image relates to the discourse surrounding Tohoku, which, as Ikeda explains, went as far as to suggest that its Otherness paralleled Japan's colonies in East and Southeast Asia, understanding the region as an "internal colony" (97). Taking up this primitivist lens through Western-style painting, Fujita's non-militaristic artworks demonstrate that the analysis of wartime art and culture cannot easily be divided along the lines of style and medium.

The Second World War has been a difficult topic to study in Asia and especially in Japan where views on its outcomes are conflicting. Calls to grapple with the nation's violence in East and Southeast Asia are met with silences, and the dominant postwar narrative has centred on Japan's "economic miracle." Ikeda's emphasis on both the global and the national in the context of Japanese wartime art is a major contribution to the field of global modernisms. Her analysis of non-militaristic war art through the lens of fascism provides a methodological toolkit for comparative studies of war art and models an incisive and nuanced study of the artistic legacies of war. Through a focus on the social lives of these artworks, the book offers insights into how Japan constructed its view of the world through its international relationships and through specific conditions of modernity and art that were constantly being re-interpreted and re-adopted to suit political needs. The book therefore offers a more complex understanding of the development of modern art and culture in twentieth century Asia. It contributes to decolonizing and de-imperializing Asian Studies, upturning Western-centrism while also challenging the politics and power structures that resulted from inter-Asian struggle. ¶

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1. As it is standard in East Asia, names are written with the family name preceding the given name. In Japan, it is also customary to refer to well-known artists by their given name.

2. For instance, the Japanese government has never officially acknowledged the Imperial Army's systemic abuse of hundreds of thousands of comfort women in China, South Korea, and the Philippines. The recent closure of the exhibition After "Freedom of Expression?" at the 2019 Aichi Triennale testifies to this lingering silence. For more information about the censorship of this exhibition, which featured a sculpture depicting a Korean comfort woman, see Philip Brasor, "Outrage over Aichi Triennale exhibition ignites debate over freedom of expression in art," *The Japan Times*, August 17, 2019, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/08/17/national/media-national/outrage-aichi-triennale-exhibition-ignites-debate-freedom-expression-art/#.XjhkCBNkqBI>.

Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience McCord Museum, Montréal

February 8 to May 5, 2019
Curated by Kent Monkman

Alexandra Nordstrom

The 150th anniversary of Canadian confederation in 2017 was commemorated across the country with activities and events organized by the federal, provincial, and municipal governments, as well as by non-governmental and philanthropic organizations. While the official programming was intended to celebrate diversity, encourage inclusion, and "establish a spirit of reconciliation with Indigenous peoples,"¹ some events focused attention on the Canadian state's treatment of Indigenous peoples, sparking conversations about the many issues Indigenous communities continue to face post-confederation. Emerging from a sesquicentennial project for the Art Museum at the University of Toronto, *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience* made its way to the McCord Museum in Montréal during a three-year national tour. *Shame and Prejudice* engaged in a re-telling of Canadian history through a solo exhibition self-curated by Cree artist