

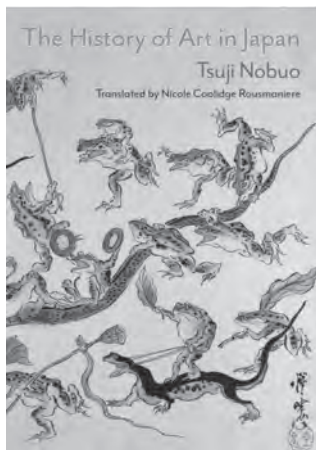
## The History of Art in Japan

BY NOBUO TSUJI AND (TRANS.) NICOLE COOLIDGE ROUSMANIERE

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Reviewed by Brenda G. Jordan



Nobuo Tsuji's *History of Art in Japan* was originally published by the University of Tokyo Press in 2005 and is now available in English translation. The book covers Japan's art history from the ancient Jōmon Era all the way to the rise of manga and anime in the twentieth century. Included is a list of the main historical eras in both Romanization and Japanese; a map of archaeological sites; a timeline for Japan, Korea, and China; long lists of scholarly English-language sources on Japanese art; and an extensive index that usefully includes the Japanese rendering of words.

The author is Professor Emeritus at the University of Tokyo and Tama Art University. Tsuji is considered one of the preeminent Japanese art historians of his generation, a trailblazer in the research on Japanese eccentrics and the arts of playfulness in Japan. His introduction to this book takes a refreshingly different approach from the usual *beaux arts* (fine arts) focus of old by including a broad selection of Japanese arts: painting, sculpture, ceramics, lacquer, textiles, metalworking, architecture, gardens, calligraphy, photography, printmaking, and design. Rather than prioritizing one kind of art over another, Tsuji develops three concepts: "wonderous adornment (*kazari*), playfulness (*asobi*), and animism." This kind of approach enables us to view the history of art in Japan more broadly and in tune with the current field of art history, as the idea of *bijutsu* (fine arts, beaux arts) didn't exist in Japan until the latter part of the nineteenth century.

The numerous scholars who assisted the translator with this edition worked hard to provide context; Tsuji, like so many Japanese scholars, assumed a great deal of knowledge on the part of his readers. Even with that, there are likely to be sections that are harder for someone unfamiliar with Japan to fully understand, particularly the numerous references to sites and objects that are not illustrated. The book is probably most useful to graduate students and scholars of East Asian art history, especially Japanese art history, and particularly as a reference book. Some chapters, such as the introduction and chapter 1 on "Jōmon: The Force of Primal Imagination," can be used for readings in a college classroom as context for the instructor's presentations. Other chapters, such as chapter 3, "Asuka and Hakuhō: The Sphere of East Asian Buddhist Arts," require a great deal of previous background in Buddhist art, particularly that of China, in order to understand the text. An instructor might use selected readings from Tsuji's book to complement other texts such as *Asian Art* (Dorinda Neave, Lara Blanchard, and Marika Sardar, 2013) rather than attempt to use it as a main text. Even as an upper-level undergraduate or graduate-level text, the instructor would need to provide historical background and contextualization in order for students to fully understand the material.

The book is extremely useful for providing a great deal of information and current research in a comprehensive English-language text.

Tsuji draws on recent scholarly research, providing readers with nuanced views of Japanese art; for example, he includes current ideas about the relationship between the Jōmon people and Yayoi people, and presents clear evidence for Korean influences in early Buddhist art. He notes the opinions and findings of other Japanese scholars and provides the reader with a wealth of information that one would normally only get from Japanese-language sources.

There are many terms, names, and places listed in the text, as well as numerous color illustrations. It seems odd, however, that temples are referred to with the word "temple" following the name (Tōdai-ji temple), when the "ji" in the name means temple. It is redundant and seems an unnecessary explanation when so many other words and terms are not repeatedly explained in the same way. On the other hand, unlike many books on Asian art, the correct Romanization is given for Japanese, Chinese, and Sanskrit words, and the index at the end gives Japanese characters for words, which is very useful. The lack of macrons to indicate "long vowels" in Japanese words (except for those words accepted into English, such as Tokyo) is a persistent problem in English texts, since this practice leads to mispronunciation of those words (Hōryūji, not Horyuji).

There are a couple of other issues that the instructor can address in class presentations. There is little to no attention given to women painters of the nineteenth century, when women such as Katsushika Ōi (Hokusai's daughter, first half of the nineteenth century) and Okuhara Seiko (1837–1913) were active. One wonders why some artists' works are illustrated but not others, such as the case of Tani Bunchō (1763–1840), who was extremely influential in the art circles of Edo around the turn of the nineteenth century. In fact, throughout the book, works of art are named but not illustrated. Although these extensive lists are invaluable, this presents a challenge for the student reading the text.

That having been said, however, no survey of Japanese art could possibly cover everything or illustrate all the important works that a scholar might consider integral to a discussion of Japanese art history. In fact, many of us would flinch at the idea of attempting such a feat. The field is enriched, therefore, by the depth of knowledge that Tsuji brings to this task, as well as to the translator and others who brought this work into English. ■

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