

【Commentary】*

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I listened to your lecture with interest. It was quite eye opening in that it made me realize that the Department of Decorative Art at the Met actually has a history of collecting Japanese and other Oriental art objects and crafts as long as the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, which is known to us for its outstanding collection in this field. I also learned that, from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, Japanese crafts, rather than Japanese art objects, were more appreciated and collected in Western countries.

In Japan, it was also the crafts that Sano Tsunetami, the vice-president of the 1873 Vienna Exposition Preparatory Committee and spokesperson for the Meiji government, gave the utmost priority to in the Japanese exhibit at the Exposition. The Kyoto City University of Arts, where I teach, was originally founded as the Kyoto Prefectural School of Painting (Kyoto-fu Gagakkō) in 1880, thanks to the ample funding provided by wealthy craftsmen in Kyoto, such as the potter, Kiyomizu Rokubei, the kimono dealer, Iida Shinshichi, and the lacquer master, Nishimura Hikotarō. Since these donors were active craftsmen, the purpose of the Kyoto Art School was to train students in their traditional fields of craftsmanship so that they would be able to undertake preliminary works, such as making sketches, for them—the master craftsmen.

As far as the Japan - U.S. relationship in art is concerned, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, established in 1876, is mostly known for its excellent collection of Japanese art, originally designed and collected by Ernest F. Fenollosa and William Sturgis Bigelow. Moreover, from 1904 to 1913, Okakura Tenshin was in charge of the actual purchase and sorting of the collected objects for the museum. There is also an interesting story concerning both the Museum of Fine Arts and the Kyoto City University of Arts: Tomita Kojiro, the son of Tomita Kōhichi, who taught in the Department of Gold Painting, went to the U.S. after graduating from the Kyoto Art School (Department of Gold Painting) in 1906, got himself employed by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in 1908, and eventually became the chief curator of

the Department of Oriental Art. As an assistant for Okakura Tenshin, he also had the full responsibility to prepare the catalogue, *The Art of Lacquer*.

*This commentary followed a presentation by Dr. Barbara Ford on “Japanese Crafts in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.” Unfortunately, the written version of Dr. Ford’s presentation was not available at the time of this printing. We deeply regret that we unable to include her paper in the symposium proceedings.