

## PREFACE

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It was early in 1994, at age twenty-one, that I moved to Japan and swiftly became aware that it was not merely onto a foreign land that I had landed. For the first time in my life I felt the sensation of walking right into a *historical moment*. The fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II loomed on the horizon, and heated talk about it was everywhere, something I hadn't noticed in the United States, my home country. How was Japan to commemorate the end of a war that had resulted in defeat and occupation? Would it revise its postwar "peace" constitution, as was floated? I didn't understand the stakes or the backstory of all this as I made the rounds in the mid-1990s to the many art museums and galleries in Tokyo and the surrounding region. But I walked gingerly through the Art Tower Mito after hearing it had been the target of a bomb threat for Yanagi Yukinori's provocative *Chrysanthemum Carpet* (1994), which was installed together with a suite of old war paintings by Fukuzawa Ichirō and other oil painters.

Then there were the troubling wartime images of Japanese and other Asian women that were excavated and re-presented by Shimada Yoshiko at Ota Fine Arts and Keiō University. While struck by the evident force of these contemporary artworks, in my youthful (American) innocence I couldn't help but wonder, why World War II? Wasn't that ancient history? My *grandfather's* war?

It was probably because of my grandfather that I ended up in Japan at all. He had served as a chemical engineer on the Manhattan Project in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, where my father was born. Despite this fateful history being in a sense, then, quite close to me, and although I was infinitely curious about Japan and Japanese art, I was woefully ignorant of the entwined recent histories of that country and my own and of the wars—World War II, the Korean War, and the Cold War—that had forged them.

Before I would leave Japan for graduate studies in Japanese art history in the United States, nearly four years later, I was kindly introduced by the American scholar-dealers Howard and Mary Ann Rogers to Sherman Lee, the renowned Asian art expert and museum director who made an indelible mark on American collections of Japanese art following World War II. Lee had served for two years on the staff of the Arts and Monuments Division under General Douglas MacArthur during the occupation. When I met him nearly five decades later, he was genuinely thrilled that a young person like me had chosen to devote her life to Japanese art. That is, until he learned I intended to focus my research on the modern period, upon which his reception turned noticeably cooler. "All Japanese art after 1868 is rubbish!" he barked in warning, referring to the fateful year of the Meiji Restoration, which ushered in everything modern. But I wasn't convinced. Countless exhibitions and artworks had already taught me otherwise. My doctoral dissertation and the book based upon it were later written as a rejoinder to Lee. But this book, many years in the making, has taken me back to a double set of origins: of my own foundations as a budding scholar amid Japan's memory wars circa 1995, and of the occupation years—the world once inhabited by Lee—fifty years before that.

What I learned in 1994 was that history doesn't always remain in the past. Artists like Yanagi and Shimada, whose works hint at structures and systems of thought long buried, reveal how the past ineluctably persists into the present. In bringing such a perspective to this project as an American, I have asked what lies buried and unseen in Japanese art history. The Japanese have their own memory issues, but what about Americans? What have we willfully forgotten or remembered? This is not a question that I, as a historian of Japanese art, can adequately answer. But this book has been an attempt to pull back the curtain on the formative historical moment that was the war and the American occupation of Japan, upon which the lives of generations of Japanese and Americans alike have since been built.