



Tokyo Fine Arts School

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Many art schools were established in various places across Asia between the 19th and 20th centuries. European and American artists and educators played an important role in many of these schools. The Tokyo Fine Arts School was no exception; it was established in 1887 by the American Ernest Fenollosa, invited to Japan under its Europeanization policy, and his student Okakura Tenshin.

However, their aim was not to promote the skills and ideas of Western art, but rather the opposite, to restore and develop traditional Japanese painting. Fenollosa and Tenshin attempted to preserve and innovate traditional painting, hoping to give birth to a painting style that was unique to Japan and not inferior to Western art. This also means, however, that traditional painting became institutionalized not from an internal necessity but by an external factor, namely the flourishing of Western art.

Although the Tokyo Fine Arts School was initiated under such circumstances, a department of Western art was eventually established and many students from countries of Asia came to study and acquire Western art skills. It is worth noting that Western art was the common interest that fostered cultural exchange within Asia.



Part of the Tokyo University of the Arts' property that retains vestiges of the Tokyo Fine Arts School in the Meiji era.

Photo: Suzuki Shoya

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Okakura Tenshin