

CONSERVATION MAKING ART HISTORY

A CLARK CONFERENCE
April 8–9, 2021

JAPANESE PAINTING: MOUNTING, MEDIATION, TRANSMISSION, RENEWAL

The display of most Japanese paintings, and hanging scrolls in particular, was specific to the occasion. Artworks were typically unrolled only for the duration of a specific event, whether a poetry gathering, tea ceremony, social visit, or religious ritual. After the span of a day or even several hours, the painting was promptly rolled up and stored away, only to be replaced by another work whose selection was calibrated for another occasion. The apparatus in which a painting was embedded—inclusive of backing talks, decorative silk mountings, and a dowel around which to roll and unroll the work—would evolve to accommodate both occasional display and compact storage. At the same time, the mounting apparatus could also serve the purpose of mediating between the work and its surroundings, both visually with the architectural interior and semantically vis-à-vis a painting’s audience and occasion. Whenever a painting was conserved (ideally once a generation but in practice more infrequently), not only was surface damage treated, but the paraphernalia that framed it could be replaced. Thus the silk mountings, the backing talks, and the dowel constitute something of a parallel history of Japanese painting in which vestiges of the history, time, use, and pedigree of the object could be discerned to varying degrees. This talk imagines just such a shadow history, identifying several important case studies as well as the insights yielded—and further questions raised—by sustained attention to the mounting apparatus. Where does the artwork end? Why is the viewing experience of paintings so textilic? How have the practices of renewing the apparatus been internalized and transmitted by conservators, and how does this embodied knowledge influence art history in the present?

Yukio Lippit is Jeffrey T. Chambers and Andrea Okamura Professor of the History of Art and Architecture at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he specializes in Japanese painting. His book *Painting of the Realm: The Kano House of Painters in Seventeenth-Century Japan* (University of Washington, 2012) was awarded the Charles Rufus Morey Book Award by the College Art Association and the John Whitney Hall Book Prize by the Association

of Asian Studies. His article “Of Modes and Manners in Medieval Japanese Ink Painting: Sesshū’s *Splashed Ink Landscape* of 1495,” was awarded the Arthur Kingsley Porter Prize by the College Art Association in 2013. His most recent books include *The Thinking Hand: Tools and Traditions of the Japanese Carpenter* (with Mark Mulligan, Edwin O. Reischauer Institute, 2014), *Sōtatsu: Making Waves* (with James Ulak, Smithsonian, 2015), *Japanese Zen Buddhism and the Impossible Painting* (Getty, 2017), *Irresolution: The Paintings of Yoshiaki Shimizu* (Princeton University Press, 2017), *The Artist in Edo* (Yale University Press, 2018), among others. Lippit has taught at the Universities of Tokyo (Japan), Heidelberg (Germany), Los Andes (Colombia), and Campinas (Brazil). From 2013 to 2018 he served as the Johnson-Kulukundis Family Faculty Director of the Arts at the Radcliffe Institute of Advanced Study. In 2018 he was appointed Harvard College Professor for a five-year term for distinguished contributions to undergraduate teaching.