Being Modern in Japan
Culture and Society from the 1910s to the 1930s

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CHAPTER FIVE

Japanese Modernism and Consumerism
Forging the New Artistic Field of “Shōgyō Bijutsu” (Commercial Art)

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“Things cannot be presented ‘naked.' They must be packaged.”

Hamada Masuji

Imagine strolling down one of the main boulevards in the Ginza. It is the early Shōwa period, the late 1920s. The streets are lined with bustling commercial establishments. You are engaged in “ginbura” (an abbreviation of the expression “Ginza de burabura suru”), referring to the activity of casually strolling and window-shopping in this high-profile commercial area. On all sides there are department stores and various shops with decorative show windows displaying textiles, clothing, household goods, books, and the like (Fig. 1). Lined with advertising signboards, billboards, and banners, the street has been transformed into an exposition-like environment through design. Then day turns to night and a flood of electric light transforms the street scene into an even more dramatic theatrical stage illuminated from above.

This transformation of the urban environment — what was referred to by many critics at the time as the “artification” of the streets — was sustained by a vibrant modern Japanese design movement, increasingly stimulated by worldwide trends in the visual arts. Traditionally an artisanal field in Japan, design was established as a major area of “artistic” endeavor in the first few decades of the twentieth century. This gradual recognition of design’s aesthetic as well as functional value has shaped its evolution and defined its central importance in the sphere of Japanese visual arts ever since. The construction of a new social status for design was not a coincidental development. It was consciously and aggressively forged by designers and design theorists who sought aesthetic and social legitimacy for the profession. Hamada Masuji (1892–1938), one of the most vocal design theorists of this period, had a major impact on the development of the modern Japanese design movement during its critical formative stage in the late 1920s and early 1930s. By publicly endorsing art as a means of persuasion and systematizing the specialized requisite knowledge, Hamada helped launch a new
professional field of artistic practice that explicitly and unapologetically put aesthetics in the service of commerce. For Hamada, products could not merely be placed in the market to speak for themselves, “naked” so to speak. They required skillful packaging, and who better to design this packaging than artists who understood the affectivity of visual stimuli.

Principal among Hamada’s works was a twenty-four-volume illustrated compendium of commercial design with annotation and theoretical analysis published by Ars from 1928 until 1930. The series, published in both hard- and softcover editions, was titled *Gendai shōgyō bijutsu zenshū* in Japanese and *The Complete Commercial Artist* in English. Hamada edited and co-wrote the publication together with over sixty well-known professional journalists, educators, and practitioners active in the design field. For the first fifteen volumes, he was one of six editorial committee members including: Watanabe Soshū (chief editor of *Zuan to kōgei* (Design and Crafts) magazine), Tatsuke Yoichirō (director of the Japanese Advertising Study Association (Nihon Kōkoku Gakkai)), Nakada Sadanosuke (managing committee member of the Association of Commercial Artists (Shōgyō Bijutsuka Kyōkai)), Miyashita Takao (professor at the Tōkyō Kōtō Kōgei Gakkō (Tokyo Higher School of Arts and Technology)),

Fig. 1 “Six varieties of expressive beauty created with the sentiment and display of commodities: Show window displays of various textiles.” In Kitazawa Yoshio (ed.), *Gendai shōgyō bijutsu zenshū*, vols 1–24, Tokyo, Ars, 1928–30 (hereafter abbreviated as GSBZ), vol. 4, ill. 3.
and Sugiura Hisui (advisor to the design division of Mitsukoshi department store). For the final nine volumes, Hamada was elevated to chief editor.

The series was distributed through direct subscription sales, selling between 1500 and 2000 copies to small commercial retailers and major Japanese companies such as Lion Dentifrice, Kao Soap, Maruzen, Hoshi Pharmaceutical, and Shiseido cosmetics, who were pioneering sponsors of innovative design work that was produced either in their newly established internal design divisions or solicited through public design competitions. Similarly, newspaper companies, which relied on commercial advertising for financial support, and emerging advertising firms such as Mammensha, Hakuhodo, and Nihon Denpo Tsushinsha (now known as Dentsu), acquired copies of the set as reference materials. This bountiful sourcebook of commercial artforms and techniques served as both a record of original design work being produced during the period and an invaluable tool for disseminating the most up-to-date design practices to small retail shops that could not afford to employ full-time designers but still sought to invest their advertising and displays with creative aesthetics. The Ars series was one of several important design compendia and textbooks published at this time, indicating the expanding market for explanatory design texts and the expansion of the commercial design field in general.4

This chapter will focus on the important contribution of Hamada Masuji to the discourse on design during the peak of his activities from 1926 until 1932. Hamada's design theory combined modernist fine-art aesthetics with the "progressive" values of industrialism: rationalism, efficiency, effectiveness, applicability, and pragmatism. To this was added a touch of popular psychology and visual perception theory, and a strong dose of Marxian social utopianism to produce Hamada's own distinct brand of "commercial art," dubbed shōgō bijutsu, a recently coined neologism of the period (c. 1926).5 In Hamada's lexicon, shōgō bijutsu was the "general term for all practical art (jissai geijutsu)." It was, in other words, a form of "artistic industry" (bijutsuteki sangyō).6 But Hamada further clarified: shōgō bijutsu was not merely any art used in advertising, what was commonly called "kōkoku bijutsu" or "senden bijutsu." Rather, it was art that formally embodied its commercial function. It required the skillful manipulation of aesthetics to "attract the consumer's eye" and "make the product stand out," effects that would further commercial interests.7 With this attitude, Hamada paved the way for both a commercialization of aesthetics and an aestheticization of commerce.8

Modernism was Hamada's tool of choice for undertaking this process of aestheticization. He redirected the visually evocative aesthetic strategies of autonomous abstract art that undergirded modernism to serve a more clearly functional purpose, beginning with the general assertion that "form itself resonated with people in distinct ways."9 It was the designer's job to maximize and direct this resonance in the mind of the consumer. Hamada and his colleagues closely followed international developments in modernism and the avant-garde through publications, exhibitions, and by traveling
abroad. Adapting Le Corbusier’s famous dictum that architecture was “a machine for living,” Hamada produced his own mechanical metaphor, declaring “art as a machine with a purpose.” The implication was that art could function pragmatically through applied design, which was manipulable in a manner akin to the precise calibrations of a machine. Industrial development as a whole became the inspiration for Hamada’s commercial art, as its vigor supplied the designer’s “energy.”

While shōgyō bijutsu now principally refers to two-dimensional graphic design, in the late 1920s and in Hamada’s writings, it was a more inclusive term, comprising three-dimensional forms such as show windows, and architectural structures used for advertising, such as kiosks and storefronts. It also overlapped with elements of industrial design, known as “sangyō bijutsu” or “sangyō hōgei,” which included product design. Japanese design historians have identified a gradual conceptual shift around the turn of the century from the long-standing artisanal notion of design (ishō) to one which implied more personal intentionality and professional standing on the part of the designer, expressed in the increasingly common terms zuan (design), dezain (design), and shōgyō bijutsu.

Commercial art came to the fore in Japan during the period between the end of the Russo-Japanese War in 1905 and the beginning of the war in China in around 1931, when many forms of culture were being “massified” and commodified. The importation of new technologies from Europe and the Untied States beginning in the late nineteenth century brought a momentous change in the relationship between culture and industry in Japan. Innovations such as the rotary press, the wireless, photography, movies, recording technology, and railroads enabled the production of a cheap and easily reproducible culture that could be efficiently disseminated throughout the nation. What has been termed by scholars as a modern “culture industry” (bunka sangyō), consisting of mass publishing, mass media, and mass entertainment, relied on these new technologies. The so-called massification (taishūka) of Japanese culture was also predicated on the cultivation of a literate consumer public that extended beyond the elite classes of society. The implementation of a nationwide education system in 1872 had significantly increased literacy and facilitated this trend.

While there were still great disparities in wealth among the Japanese populace, the standard of living was generally rising for most sectors during the interwar period. This was particularly true for the expanding middle class, as well as a segment of this population who became nouveau riche (narikin) due to the boom economy during World War I. Increased prosperity provided many middle-class Japanese people with extra money and time to spend on recreation. It stimulated and transformed an urban leisure economy that had been developing since Tokugawa times. This period saw a rapid expansion of consumerism, especially among women, for goods and entertainment. The “modern girl” (or “moga” as she was commonly known) was just one particularly visible member of this expanded consumer public.
The rapid boom in consumerism produced valuable work opportunities for artists in the commercial sector. Many commercial establishments, from department stores to major manufacturers, were establishing internal design divisions in order to develop effective visual and verbal strategies to advertise and market their products. These divisions were often manned by artist-designers, many of whom, after studying at prestigious art schools and private ateliers around the country, became specialists in commercial design. At the same time, a host of new design and craft schools were being established around Japan, most notably the Tōkyō Kōtō Kōgei Gakkō (Tokyo High School of Industrial Arts) opened in 1922, to meet the demands of increased industrial production and commercial activity. Individual groups and companies all over Japan began sponsoring academic study sessions on advertising and design, which concentrated on analyzing major modern trends. This was so widespread that Kawahata Naomichi has gone so far as to dub the 1930s "the era of design study groups," identifying over sixty associations known to have formed during this time.

The study of design from a historical perspective, however, has several obstacles. Principal among them is the difficulty of identifying designers and attributing their works, as commercial art was often not signed and the designers themselves were often not named in company histories, even though they were clearly instrumental in establishing brand images in the public imagination. As Louisa Rubinfien's work on the companies Kao Soap and Ajinomoto has definitively shown, there was an important shift to product brand name recognition from the turn of the century, beginning with the establishment of a trademark registration law in 1884. And brand image definition played a crucial role in the success of these companies. This included everything from logos to innovative and colorful package design. In this respect, the Ars series presentation of thousands of executed designs and design plans, many of which were labeled with the artists' names, made a strong statement about the important role of designers. Hamada argued, principally to the art community, that designers needed to be pulled out from behind the scenes and given the social recognition they deserved. He was, however, faced with deeply ingrained biases. Despite the lack of a clear distinction between arts and crafts in premodern Japanese artistic practice, a new term distinguishing the fine arts, "bijutsu," had come into use well over fifty years prior to Hamada's activities, around the time of the Vienna World's Fair in 1873. Having seen the social status enjoyed by artists in Western countries, many Japanese artists returning from abroad fought to establish fine art as an autonomous sphere of cultivated intellectual endeavor worthy of social recognition. In the process, however, they rigidified the previously fluid boundaries among the fine arts, decorative arts, and crafts, thus creating a self-conscious artistic hierarchy on the model of the West. This categorization was then reinforced by the establishment of an official salon in 1907 sponsored by the Ministry of Education, called the Monbushō Bijutsu Tenrankai (abbreviated as "Bunten"), which was dedicated to exhibiting fine art.
By the 1920s, this hierarchical mentality was well inculcated through the art establishment and art education, although in actual practice the areas still blended. Most artist-designers themselves did not consider design activity their principal artistic contribution and emphasized their "pure art" (junsei or junsei geijutsu) work as being of greater aesthetic importance. Art historian Michelle Bogart has noted a similar enduring prejudice against commercial art in the American context during the same period. She attributes this partially to power politics within the field of fine art as "efforts to claim jurisdiction over art [was a] means of acquiring authority." Informed by Marxist theories of culture, Hamada was blunter in assigning blame. "Pure art," he claimed, was "controlled by bourgeois ideology," serving only the needs of the ruling class. It was his foremost goal to redress this artistic hierarchy, elevating commercial art to the level of so-called pure art. Due to its intrinsically compelling nature, commercial art, Hamada felt, would eventually eclipse all forms of art for art's sake.

In the meantime, just naming the field was a significant act in the then climate of the Japanese art world, as it identified a vast realm of artistic production that went entirely unacknowledged. Hamada lamented that "in some respects, it can be said that shōgyō bijutsu has not yet been born in Japan." Indeed, out of all the full-time designers working during the prewar period, only a handful had public recognition. For high-visibility projects, it was common for artists already well established in the world of fine arts to be commissioned to paint a work that would then be used for advertising purposes. This work was generally not pictorially intended to represent a particular product or industry. Rather, businesses sought to invest their trades with the refined image of fine art, thereby distancing themselves from direct association with commerce. This reflected a persistent Edo-period social bias against those directly involved with commercial activity, partially rooted in neo-Confucian morality. Thus, posters of "beautiful women" (bijinga), which had been used for hundreds of years to represent style, sophistication, and elegance, were still the most appealing for promotional purposes. Portrait of a Woman, by the renowned academic oil painter Okada Saburosuke, from 1907, for example, was quickly adapted into the now famous Mitsukoshi department store poster with the simple addition of the store's name. Like many of his academic colleagues, including his illustrious teacher Kuroda Seiki, Okada produced paintings for commercial use throughout his career. Magazine covers, such as a year-long series for Shufu no tomo (The Housewife's Companion) magazine in 1923, and a commemorative calendar for the same publication in 1927, were just a few examples. Still, the professional identity of these artists was always solidly situated within the lofty precinct of fine arts.

One artist-designer who was able to establish a public reputation in the graphic arts, paving the way for activist-designers like Hamada, was undoubtedly Sugiura Hisui. In fact, Hisui was one of the editorial committee members of the Ars design series. From 1910 until 1934, Hisui was the chief designer at Mitsukoshi department
store. The popularity of his *art nouveau* and *art deco*-inspired designs catapulted him into national recognition in the Japanese art world. Most of Hisui's designs still relied on elements of the *bijinga* tradition, but they displayed a new concern for graphically accentuating the identity of the sponsor. This included, for instance, the direct incorporation of the modern architectural structures of the department store buildings. The store was also represented synecdochically in posters through the display of its promotional magazine *Mitsukoshi*, well known for publicizing new consumer trends. In one widely circulated image, the magazine was conspicuously presented on the lap of a seated female figure, quickly recognizable as an example of the "new woman" (*atarashii onna*) by her hairstyle, apparel, and modern domestic surroundings. A direct connection was implied between the store and the woman's stylish new lifestyle.

Hisui's solid training in the fine arts under the tutelage of Kuroda Seiki, and his strong personal ties to the fine arts community, gave his design endeavors social status to which others of equal ability could only have aspired. He used his position to promote the graphic arts in the public eye and within art education. Hisui formed a design study association called the "Group of Seven" (Shichininsha). The Group published a magazine titled *Affiches* (Posters 1927–29, 1930), holding annual poster shows of domestic and international work during the same period. Perhaps one of Hisui's greatest contributions as a design proponent was the introduction of the concept of "total design." Taking his lead from European *art nouveau* designers, he supported the notion of designing the entire lived environment. His legacy to design pedagogy is preserved at the prestigious Tama Art University (Tama Bijutsu Daigaku, formerly Tama Teikoku Bijutsu Gakkō), which he helped found in 1935 and where he served as school president for many years.\(^{25}\)

Like Hisui, Hamada Masuji was also trained in fine art, first in Western-style painting at the White Horse Society Western-style painting studio run by Kuroda and his students, and then at the academic Pacific Painting Society studio. After this he entered the Tokyo School of Fine Arts sculpture division. And like so many of his contemporaries, he began freelancing as a commercial designer while still in school. In 1926, he and a group of young colleagues formed the Association of Commercial Artists (Shōgyō Bijutsuka Kyōkai) (Fig. 2) which published the periodical *Shōgyō bijutsu* (Commercial Art) from 1930.\(^{26}\) The Association mounted yearly exhibitions, mostly in fine art venues that were reviewed with great interest in both the art and popular press. The group were referred to as "artists of the streets" because of their impact on the look of the urban environment.\(^{27}\) Association chapters were established throughout the country — in Osaka in October 1927, followed by Nagasaki, Sendai, Iwate, and Hiroshima.\(^{28}\) They opened a study center from 1929. Three years later Hamada established his own design school, the *Shōgyō Bijutsu Kōsei Juku*, in Totsuka. This was a three-year program for certification as a commercial artist. All the while he continued to participate in many published roundtable discussions.
In addition to producing the Ars compendium, Hamada wrote a two-volume set of textbooks, *Shōgyō bijutsu kyōhon* (Textbooks for Commercial Art), for would-be designers and published numerous texts explaining the conceptual elements of design in the early 1930s. Still, the most comprehensive expression of his theory of *shōgyō bijutsu* was published in the final volume of the Ars series, a 100-page essay explicating the theoretical underpinnings of commercial design and the social implications of the field. Hamada called commercial art “art with a purpose” (*mokuteki no bijutsu*), as distinct from pure art or art for art’s sake which was produced entirely for aesthetic appreciation and individual expression. His theory centered around the notion of purpose. Thus, how efficiently, effectively, pragmatically, and appropriately a work served its purpose were the main criteria for evaluating its worth, while pure art was measured by the gauges of beauty and aesthetic pleasure. In *shōgyō bijutsu* the new scientific credo of the age that came hand in hand with industrialism was expressed in buzzwords such as rationalism (*gōri*), exactitude (*seikaku*), clarity (*meiryō*), suitability to purpose (*gōmokuteki*), and a host of others. Hamada argued that this form of art addressed the real-life conditions of a modern industrial society under capitalism. It was less elitist, appealing to the mass consumer. Hamada believed that in the end the practical or applied arts would actually enable the artist to break through the limiting bonds of subjectivity in pure art.

Heralding a new consciousness for design, Hamada advocated the independence of the designer vis-a-vis the client. And, design should have a conceptual — and even social — underpinning that would function beyond purely monetary objectives. This signaled a new combination of the spiritual and the materialist. Design would transform a product into a commodity by mediating between the producer and the market,
generating image and desire. Commercial art was “that which went beyond pure purpose; it [was] what inspired love, attachment (aichaku),” enabling the “spiritual elevation of commerce.”

Hamada’s “commercial art” tended to emphasize production, downplaying consumption as the “bourgeois” component of modern commerce. He claimed that the “main purpose of commerce was to enhance the prosperity and livelihood of the masses” and that “mass production would solve problems by producing only practical, necessary items rather than consumer demand items.” Yet despite his claims to the contrary, consumption was still the essential flip side to Hamada’s commercial art strategies. It was the implied, and hoped for, consequence of these techniques. Moreover, it was developments in the consumer market that fueled the expansion of the commercial design field as much as, if not more than, increases in production. This fundamental contradiction remained unreconciled in Hamada’s writings.

Hamada also gave little serious attention to the issue of a product’s merit or the designer’s possible complicity in creating “false need.” Instead, he somewhat naively asserted the importance of “sincerity” when promoting a store and its products, warning simply that “deception will be discovered.” Additional slogans, such as “move away from profiteering and towards social meaning,” are repeated throughout Hamada’s text, showing a heavy reliance on the integrity of the producer and the designer to safeguard the interests of the consumer. Yet it is undeniable that the same effective strategies Hamada was championing were often effective precisely because they persuaded consumers to purchase superfluous items.

Color, composition, and materials were just a few of the elements Hamada advocated employing to make a product stand out, to accentuate its special features, and to attract the eye of the consumer. He drew upon the abstract formalist strategies of modernist and avant-garde art to produce visual “agitation” (sendō). Many of these techniques were pioneered by progressive artist-designers abroad, such as the Russian and international constructivists, the Dutch artists of De Stijl, and the diverse group at the Bauhaus in Germany, who were attempting to integrate fine art with social praxis through design. Their work was predicated on the notion that a designed environment could alter the perception and action of its inhabitants. Artists associated with the Bauhaus figured prominently in Hamada’s examples, owing to the fact that one of his close colleagues and a member of the publication editorial committee was the avid Bauhaus proponent Nakada Sadanosuke (1888–1970). Nakada had visited the Bauhaus in the early 1920s and was among the first to introduce the school’s work to a Japanese audience beginning in 1925.

Tatsuke Yoichirō, one of the other Ars editorial committee members, compared the work of Japanese commercial artists to that of the Wiener Werkstätte and other joint craft–industry initiatives. Tatsuke was director of the Japanese Advertising Study Association and published on international trends in design practice. His 1926
survey Oubei shōgyō posutā (European and American Commercial Posters) presented a systematic analysis of the conceptual underpinnings of the poster as a form of mass communication and then went on to feature a broad array of historical and contemporary examples from around the world. In the light of this strong internationalist orientation, it is not surprising that Hamada’s articulation of shōgyō bijutsu corresponded with developments in Euro-American design that the historian Paul Greenhalgh has designated the international “Modern Movement,” particularly the period within this movement which he has called the “Pioneer Phase” — from World War 1 until the early 1930s. This refers to a group of avant-garde artist-designers who, like their Japanese counterparts, put forth a vision of how the designed world could transform human consciousness and improve material conditions. These designers tended to have a holistic and absolutist world-view, and their foremost concern was to break down barriers between aesthetics, technology, and society to produce for the mass of the population.

Hamada’s final essay in the compendium best illustrates the relationship between commercial art and international art developments. It begins with a series of
illustrations showing various modernist and avant-garde works of art. Among each grouping is at least one piece labeled “shōgō bijutsu,” demonstrating the easy conversion of modernist “isms” into styles for the commercial realm. Figure 3 shows a group of constructivist works. The images labeled A and D are by the Russian constructivists El Lissitzky and Natan Altman. Images B and C are two Bauhaus material studies, fundamental exercises in the school’s primary course, which served as a transitional stage between art and design. The piece on the lower right, E, is identified as a show window display for a German stationery store. The surrounding works employ lively abstract compositions, dynamic asymmetry, bold projecting diagonals, strong contrast and effective manipulation of material’s, and, unlike the black-and-white reproductions here, bold color contrasts in the original images, particularly red, black, and white. The show window displays similar techniques. Even the German text that reads: “Why, why, why drive yourself crazy, please use our instruments” visually accentuates the composition by its off-kilter, perpendicular positioning in relation to the geometric forms. The layering of square components that diminish in scale draws the eye down toward the right corner and to the goods displayed below. The books and writing implements lie on the platform and are inserted into the display.
In Figure 4, Hamada presents an array of abstract paintings. Images A and B are suprematist works by the Russian artist Kasimir Malevich. Image C is by the De Stijl principal, Theo Van Doesberg. Image E is a collage-construction created as a homage to Van Doesburg by the Japanese artist Murayama Tomoyoshi. And Images D and F are by Hamada himself. Image D is identified as an experimental "rational composition" for use in a poster, with no product explicitly mentioned. Image F, in the right corner, is identified as a design for a beer poster. Mirroring Van Doesburg's work to the left, Hamada produces a lively decorative backdrop that simultaneously camouflages and reveals the katakana letters for "beer" looming above. Immediately below, one can make out the shape of a bottle, its label, and perhaps even roughly discern figures seated at tables in a café. The abstract composition subtly discloses its figurative content to the viewer. A leap of imagination is invited.
In the numerous other similar comparisons, all styles are shown to have practical design applications in terms of the structure of display, the exploitation of material qualities, or as lively background images to draw attention to products and advertising text. Another volume in the series illustrates actual examples of Japanese show windows, several experimenting with modernist design techniques. One display (Fig. 5 top) presents "new cinnamon felt hats" on sale at Maruzen. In the Maruzen window, the emphatic curve of the display echoes the rounded shape of the hat brim connecting the display with the displayed. The use of only two hats and their geometric, architectonic shapes accords with the minimalist, structured form of the display. The tipped hat playfully acknowledges the presence of the viewer. The window reproduced below (Fig. 5 bottom) advertises international newspapers and magazines, announcing a display of samples on the top floor of the store. Here the bold black grid of the display props structures the visual field of the window, creating easily legible compartments for text and commodities. This is accentuated through color contrasts of black, white, and presumably primary colors.

Some of the most intriguing examples of show windows in the Ars series were those for the display of fabrics, one of the most common commodities advertised at the time. The composite of photographs in Figure 1 attests to the tremendous creativity of these projects. The material malleability of the fabric enabled a range of visually striking display compositions. A visual texture was created through overlapping and juxtaposition. Bold diagonal sweeps of material were used to catch the viewer's eye,

Fig. 6 Nakazato Kenzō, "Display prop for various dyed goods for the modern woman who demands a lyrical mood." In GSBZ, vol. 4, ill. 13.
carrying it from one side to the other. In certain cases, the fabric almost appears like shafts of light illuminating a stage or projecting into the sky. In others, mannequins (referred to as chinretsu ningyō, display dolls, or chōkoku ningyō, sculpture dolls) are shown draped in cloth, inviting the consumer to imagine herself enveloped by the sensual material and eliciting a bodily response. The extant black-and-white photographs cannot do justice to the actual kaleidoscopic color of the displays. Just an inkling of their resplendence, however, can be garnered from a vibrant sketch provided by Nakazato Kenzō for a prospective fabric display in the Ars series (Fig. 6). He similarly takes advantage of the sinuous and diaphanous quality of the material. Here the organic draping of the fabric is contrasted with the more geometric and rectilinear composition of the backdrop behind.

Hamada drew inspiration from modernist art for even the most basic elements of display platform design and props. In Figure 7, he set his own plastic arts window display (labeled C below), among sculptural works by the De Stijl designer Georges Vantongerloo (labeled A above), and a sculptural motif for a Bauhaus stage design by
Kurt Schmidt and Georg Teltcher (under the letter B). The massing of volumetric forms on the show-window stage and the effective use of props for structuring window space was a central concern. In fact, it was likened to theatrical stage design. This experimentation is documented in many systematic studies and charts of various stepped stage platform options and backdrop organization systems such as seen in Figure 8. The systematization of this information in diagrams and sketches was invaluable for pedagogic purposes. Moreover, it lent the subjective artistic endeavor of design an air of scientific credibility, as if to imply that through methodical study absolute results could be guaranteed.

The compendium served as a kind of pattern book of design ideas, all at one's fingertips for easy reproduction or modification. Not only were new, modern styles employed to imbue commodities with a stylish aura, but new technologies and materials associated with modern industry were proffered as a means to create an exciting spectacle for the consumer. Display functioned both inside the show window and outside the store itself. The "sales street decoration" (uridashi gaitō sōshoku) was used as a temporary prosthetic for the front of the building. According to Hamada, these structures were designed to elicit a psychological response based on "group mentality." That is to say, they were expected to pique the curiosity of pedestrians, relying on the assumption that if one person stopped, soon a crowd would congregate. 42 As a gateway to the commodity exposition within, the decorative entrance, whether an arch or a pillar, was intended to produce an atmosphere of excitement. Slick modern materials like glass, metal, and electric lighting went a long way in facilitating this effect. The rendering in Figure 9 shows just one of the many outlandish and elaborate plans proposed for this purpose in the Ars series. In this design by Ishimoto Kikuji, a founding member of the Secessionist Architecture Association (Bunriha Kenchiku-kai), structural members were used to broadcast advertising information. The medallions here exclaimed the "large sale." The vertical column would display the date. The ABC lettering on the cornice would presumably be customized to the particular location. On a slightly smaller scale, advertising pillars could similarly be used to coax the consumer into the building.

Hamada saw unlimited potential for advertising in outdoor public spaces. The compendium illustrates a range of outdoor advertising strategies such as kiosks, sandwich-boards, decorated automobiles and

![Fig. 8 "Standard box-shaped display stands and their expressive appearances.
In GSBZ, vol. 4, ill. 42.](image-url)
Fig. 9 Ishimoto Kikujirō, “Sales street decoration for the storefront.” In GSBZ, vol. 10, ill. 5.
trucks, and large-scale painted and electric or neon signboards. Of course, many of these modes of advertisement already existed in some form or another dating back sometimes as far as the seventeenth century. Street kiosks, known as “advertising towers” (kōkoku-tō or senden-tō), were pillars or small buildings that functioned primarily as architectural signboards, such as those used for promoting Maruzen ink and Kirin beer erected at the Japan Peace Memorial Exhibition in Tokyo in 1922. A number of scholars have discussed the related spectacular environments of the exposition fair-ground and the department store. This, of course, included both the indoor environment of the store and the transformed theater of the street outside. Many designers and display companies were involved in both areas.

Along with trains and ships, automobiles and trucks were the representative new transportation technologies of the modern age. For advertising purposes they were effective because they enabled mobile promotion, circulating through the urban population. Furthermore, it was argued that a moving device was infinitely more visually stimulating than a stationary one. This was not lost on avant-garde designers in Russia who had been using painted trains as a principal agitprop technique for several years since the revolution. Hamada’s suggested design for an advertising truck (Fig. 10) — the generic text reading “advertising” — allowed for easy substitution of individualized copy.

The innovative and expressive use of new kinds of typography (zuán moji) in commercial advertising was a major strategy for producing an eye-catching and modern look. The shape, size, and hue of printed text, its position and composition, all

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Fig. 10 Hamada Masuji, “Decorated vehicle for the advertisement of sales.” In GSBZ, vol. 10, ill. 4.
became important design components. Visual and textual elements were highlighted through combination and conscious juxtaposition to accent both two- and three-dimensional forms. Designers labored to evoke the pictorial and expressive qualities of letter forms. This, of course, was not new in Japan and other Asian countries that possessed strong calligraphic traditions. Modern Japanese designers found the two syllabaries, hiragana and katakana, Chinese characters, and now romanized letters as well, fertile ground for experimentation. One of the first comprehensive explications of typography, titled Zuan moji taikan (Typographic Handbook), was published by the poster designer Yajima Shūichi several years before the Ars series. In the introduction to Yajima’s book, architect and Tokyo Imperial University professor Takeda Goichi argued that there was a need for new letter forms to fit modern commodities. And he concluded that “beautiful typography [was] the most effective way of promoting the worth of a commodity.” Takeda echoed the contemporary widespread recognition of the importance of typography in visual communication and for the encouragement of consumption.

Experiments in the so-called rational or new typography of European and Russian artists also skillfully integrated text and image to produce a powerful tool for commercial and political ends. It was in 1928 that the German typographer Jan Tschichold published his ground-breaking handbook, Die neue Typographie (The New Typography), considered by scholars to be “unsurpassed as the best single document” displaying the developments in modernist typography. Japanese designers quickly became aware of such new developments in Western modernist typography, mostly
through published sources and a few exhibitions of poster design. In his book-length study of developments in avant-garde art abroad, Murayama Tomoyoshi quoted the Bauhaus instructor Laszlo Moholy-Nagy on the importance of typography in the visual arts:

*Printing technology is the most powerful form. It must be a clear means. It must be specially emphasized . . . First, all printed words must have the clarity of a singular meaning. They must be easy to read. No a priori aesthetic knowledge must be necessary . . . letters must not be forced into a square form. Corresponding with the essence and purpose of the printed matter, we must allow an unrestricted use of typefaces, letter arrangements (i.e., not always organizing the letters in straight or parallel lines), and geometrical forms and colours. 46*

As recommended by Moholy-Nagy, the Ars design compendium offered a host of typographic and compositional strategies for maximizing visual effect, once again readily appropriated or adapted by any designer for use in any circumstance. In the three beer advertisement signboards by Fujii Kiyoshi (Fig. 11), the designer draws attention to the images by using stark primary colors, dynamic diagonal compositions, and bold typography. He also accentuates the nominal identity of the beer through motif. From left to right the beers are named “Star beer,” “Moon beer,” and “Sun beer,” and corresponding representations are seen in the images.

An equally significant new instrument for the development of commercial art was photography, a topic which has been well studied and will not be greatly elaborated upon here. 47 Photography, or more specifically photogravure, was incorporated into advertising around 1910. The vast majority of represented images, as in graphic works, were pictures of beautiful women. Photographs lent advertisements an aura of reality because they purported to record the truth. According to Hamada, people trusted photographs more than any other medium. They were reliable and clear, two key components for promoting confidence in the consumer. A photograph was the next best thing to being able to present the commodity itself. In fact, it was better, because photographs could be cleverly manipulated to produce certain visual and emotional responses while maintaining the semblance of unmediated representation. 48 Designers in the 1920s seized on the techniques of modernist or “new photography” (known in Japanese as “shinkō shashin”) for commercial (and political) purposes, particularly the creative fusing of disparate images and texts in photomontage. By combining two or more images, by joining drawing and graphic shapes to the photograph, by adding a significant spot of color, or by adding a written text,” observes Christopher Phillips, the designer could “divert the photograph from what it ‘naturally’ seems to say,” and “underscore the need for the viewer’s active ‘reading’ of the image.” 49 In the commercial arena, this was employed to create a non-linear promotional narrative that metonymically linked the paired correlates of text and
image — the product and its concept. It provided a multiple, but still controlled, perspective that sought to sway the viewer/consumer through the accumulation of layers of meaning that always returned to product and company identity.

In the compendium, Arai Sen presents a humorous combination of women’s faces and large typography to promote the fictitious “bigan” (beautiful face) soap (Fig. 12). Arai’s eye-catching composition is animated by the dynamic zig-zagging layout of seemingly disparate photographic and textual fragments; dramatically cropped images of glamorous, exotic Western women from Hollywood movies are interspersed with the product brand name and the repeated English word “soap.” The eye is drawn from the upper left-hand corner across the page to the right where it ricochets off the head of an attractive woman, whose enticing stare establishes direct eye contact with the viewer. The composition then reverses the course of the viewer’s gaze back to the left, from where it is jerked in reverse once again to the right and down to the bottom of the page. The composite as a whole is somewhat tenuously anchored at the bottom by the incongruous image of the Little Rascals all clustered together staring intensely at a superimposed object labeled “soap” held in the grasp of the central figure. Part of the appeal of this image, and photomontage in general, is precisely its incongruity — the
reframing of unrelated images through self-conscious coordination that forces the viewer to reconsider the “natural” meaning of the image. Since this design mock-up was merely a proposal and not an actual advertisement, its effectiveness in the marketplace unfortunately cannot be gauged. But the increasing use of photomontage in Japanese commercial design throughout the 1930s attests to the popularity and, one can surmise, efficacy of this form.

In arguing for the systematic application of visual art techniques in commercial design, Hamada successfully helped forge the new category of artistic production labeled “shōgyō bijutsu,” which imbued art with a purpose and aestheticized commerce. Seeking to influence consumers by visually manipulating their perception of goods, daily life, and even the urban environment, he attributed to commercial art the potential for promoting social change through innovative forms and new functions. The Ars compendium and Hamada’s other voluminous writings served as invaluable tools for disseminating these new conceptions of design. They also publicized the names of individual designers generally engaged behind the scenes in this process.

Together with a broad range of activist-designers, Hamada and his circle of colleagues in the Association of Commercial Artists spearheaded a movement to construct a new social status for design, legitimating commercial art as a significant area of artistic practice. This in fact marked a convergence of concerns between modern designers and fine artists around the world. Artists active in the “new art movement” (shinbō bijutsu undō) in Japan and various avant-garde groups abroad were increasingly seeking to incorporate a more productivist perspective into the realm of fine arts in an effort to make their work more applicable to the conditions of daily life, while those in the commercial art sphere sought to aestheticize their production by applying modernist visual techniques to everyday design. The abundance of publications on various areas of design practice, the explosion of design study groups, and the establishment of educational programs in design as independent institutions or within fine art academies by the early 1930s greatly reinforced the importance of this area of artistic production in the Japanese art world. Moreover, the incorporation of a crafts section into the official annual salon sponsored by the Ministry of Education in 1927 was an important step in elevating craft, and by extension design, in the academy and the public eye. Finally, the active participation of designers in state initiatives from clothing reform to propaganda production promoted them to an advisory level equivalent to other members of the intelligentsia such as university academics.

This, of course, did not mean that there was not still plenty of resistance to Hamada’s project. There were prominent artists, such as the celebrated nihonga (Japanese-style) painter Yokoyama Taikan, who were adamantly opposed to the incorporation of design under the rubric of fine arts because of its aesthetic unworthiness. The social recognition of design and the designer in Japan in the public, official, and fine arts arenas was a gradual process that only culminated in the postwar period.
"The real beauty of art is found in our surroundings, in our daily life — in produced objects and practical goods," wrote Hamada. This adulation of the utilitarian nature of industrialism was mixed with a Utopian vision that aimed to reach a mass audience. It questioned the recondite premises of art for art's sake, searching for a new form of applicability, because, in Hamada's words, if "beauty in art is to be esteemed, it must speak to everyone. It is assumed that to appreciate art one must be educated and cultivate knowledge. But does beauty need to be difficult to understand?" While Issey Miyake and Yuko Tadanori may not be what Hamada had in mind when he put forth his populist vision of "shōgyō bijutsu," they are certainly the living legacy of his project.

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Notes

2 In his essay, Hamada quotes various responses to the Association of Commercial Artists' work and exhibitions that appeared contemporaneously in Japanese newspapers such as Kobunin shinbun, Yamato shinbun, Yoroju chōhō, Nihon shinbun, Maujū shinbun, and Minato shinbun. All refer to the group's art as an "art of the streets" (kaijū bijutsu), and one reporter writing for the Yoroju chōhō noted that the group was calling for a comprehensive "artification of the daily life of the masses" (taitō seihatsu no geijutsu). Ibid., pp. 10–11.
3 Kitazawa Yoshio (ed.), Gendai shōgyō bijutsu zenshū, vols. 1–24, Tokyo, Ars, 1928–30. Hereafter abbreviated as GSžBZ.
4 According to extensive research conducted by Kawahata Naomichi, some of the important commercial publications on design theory and practice during this time were: Dr. Anna Berliner, Japanische Reklame in der Tageszeitung (Japanese Newspaper Advertisements), Stuttgart, C.E. Foeschel Verlag, 1925; Sugitua Hisui and Watanabe Sōshū, Zuun no biyakusha (The Aesthetics of Design), Tokyo, Atelier-sha, 1931; Sugitua Hisui and Watanabe Sōshū, Zuun no kenkyū (Study of Design), Toyo Seikōkan Shuppan, 1934; and Zuun shin gihō hōsetsu (Course on New Methods of Design), vols. 1–7, Tokyo, Atelier-sha, 1932–33.
5 The term "shōgyō bijutsu" was coined around 1926, but only came into regular parlance in the early 1930s.
7 ibid., pp. 11–13.
8 ibid., p. 62.
9 ibid., p. 14.
10 ibid., p. 85.
11 ibid., p. 16.
12 According to design historian Kayano Yatsuka, the term "deżain" and its newly coined Japanese translation "zuun" were both introduced into the Japanese lexicon at the time of the Vienna World's Fair in 1873. Kayano Yatsuka, Kindai Nihon no deżain bunkashi 1868–1926, Tokyo, Furiyuu Atosha, 1992, pp. 56–58. The term "ishō" continued to be used interchangeably or in combination with "zuun" throughout the prewar period. Anne Gossot, "L'affiche publicitaire et le garafushi deżain au Japon (1854–1960)," Histoire de l'Art, no. 24, December 1993, p. 82. Kashiwagi Hiroshi, "Nihon no kindai deżain.," in Kenchiku to deżain, Nihon bijutsu zenshū, kindai no bijutsu IV, no. 24, Tokyo, Kōdansha, 1993, p. 169. For the influence of Asai Chū in the transformation of the conception of design in Japan, see Christophe Marquet, "Asai Chū to 'zuun,'" in Kenchiku to deżain, pp. 178–9, 182.
13 Minami Hiroshi and Shakai Shinni Kenkyūjo, Taishō bungaku, Tokyo, Keiso Shobō, 1965, pp. 118–19; Ishikawa Hiyoshi and Ozaki Hatsuaki, Shuppan kōkoku to rekishi, Tokyo, Shuppan Nipponsha, 1989, pp. 12–14. It was around this time that the term “marketing” was first coined.


15 The Tokyo School of Fine Arts (Tokyō Bijutsu Gakkō, present-day Tokyo Geijutsu Daigaku) was, in 1896, one of the first art schools to establish a design section. Later, in May 1923, the section was subdivided into a division for design (zuan) and a division for architecture (kōchiku). Independent design schools, however, had been established prior to this in the mid-Meiji period as part of a larger governmental initiative to promote product design and national industry for the benefit of the Japanese economy. Tokyo Higher Industrial School (Tokyō Kōdō Kōgyō Gakkō) was originally founded in 1881 as Tokyo Worker’s School (Tokyō Shokkō Gakkō), renamed Tokyo Industrial School (Tokyō Kōgyō Gakkō) in 1890, and then renamed as a higher school of crafts in 1901 with the addition of an industrial design department (kōgyō zuanka). A parallel institution, the Kyoto School for Industrial Arts (Kyōto Kōdō Kōgei Gakkō), was established in the Kansai area in 1902.

16 According to Mori Hitoshi, these schools were established in the period after the government had taken an active role in developing design education as a means of promoting production and industry during the Meiji period. For a detailed discussion of the school curriculum, see Mori Hitoshi, “The 1930s of [sic] Tokyo Kōdō Kōgei Gakkō,” in Matsuō Kyoiku Linkai (ed.), Shukaku no Shōwa 1930–1940, Matsuō, Matsuō Kyoiku Linkai, 1998, p. 23.


19 For a discussion of the construction of the term “bijutsu,” see Kitazawa Norio, Me no shinden, Tokyo, Bijutsu Shuppansha, 1989, pp. 105–55. It was not until 1927 that the Bunten (renamed the Teikoku Bijutsuin Tenrankai (Exhibition of the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts) in 1918 and abbreviated as Tenri) inaugurated a crafts (kōgei) section in which industrial arts were also exhibited.


23 ibid., pp. 3, 15.


25 At Tama, Hisui placed special emphasis on design pedagogy in the school curriculum. For more information on Hisui’s career, see Sugiyama Hisui, Nihon modan dezain no hishō, Tokyo, Tabako to Shio no Hakubutsukan, 1994.

26 The Association also published the Shōgyō bijutsu shinbun in 1931. Several other Association members also went on to write actively on design, one of the most prominent among them being Murota Kurazō, who published the long-running, more mainstream periodical, Advertising World (Kōkoku kai), which ran for 194 issues from March 1926 until the end of 1941. James Fraser, Steven Heller, and Seymour Chwast, Japanese Modern: Graphic Design Between the Wars, San Francisco, Chronicle Books, 1996, pp. 88, 97. Murota also published several books, including Shin kōkoku hōsaikuron, Tokyo, Seibundo, 1935.

27 See note 2.


29 In addition to his series of textbooks, Hamada’s publications include: Shōgyō bijutsu kōsei genri, Tokyo, Köyō Shoin, 1935; and Shōgyō bijutsu kōza, 5 vols., Tokyo, Ateliersha, 1937–38. Hamada also wrote regularly for the journal Kōgei jidai, which ran from December 1926 until October 1927.


31 ibid., pp. 57–8.

32 ibid., pp. 70–1.

33 ibid., p. 66.

34 ibid., p. 74.

35 ibid., p. 13.
Nakada Sadanosuke, "Kokuritsu Bauhaus (I)," Mizue, no. 244, June 1925, pp. 2–7; Nakada Sadanosuke, "Kokuritsu Bauhaus (II)," Mizue, no. 245, July 1925, pp. 8–12; Nakada Sadanosuke, "Bauhausu Goigi," Mizue, no. 248, October 1925, pp. 37–8; Nakada Sadanosuke, "Wârutsu Guroptusu Susan, " Kenchiku shincho, vol. 6, no. 10, October 1925, pp. 1–5; Nakada Sadanosuke, "Bauhausu o kataru," Kögei jidai, vol. 2, no. 1, January 1927, pp. 113–22. The avant-garde artist Murayama Tomoyoshi, leader of the group Mavo, was also instrumental in introducing the design theories of artists associated with the Bauhaus, particularly Laszlo Moholy-Nagy. See Murayama Tomoyoshi, Köseha kenkyû, Tokyo, Chô Bijutsusha, 1926.


Tatsûke Yoichirô, Oude shôgô posi, Tokyo, Nihon Kôkoku Gakkai Shuppan, 1926.


The original text in German read, "Warum, warum, warum Kopfzerbrechen, verwenden sie bitte unsere Hilfsmittel."

See Mizusawa Tsutomu, chapter one in this volume, for other references to Murayama.


Quoted in James Fraser et al., Japanese Modern, p. 123.


Half of volume 14 in Hamada's design compendium was dedicated to explicating the vast range of effective uses of photography in commercial art. See Hamada's essay "Shashin oyobi manga oyû kôkoku no gainen," in Kitarâwa Yoshio (ed.), Shashin oyobi manga oyû kôkokushû, vol. 13, Genjô shôgô biyutsu zenshû, Tokyo, Ars, 1928, pp. 3–8. Other contributions to the same volume included an essay by Nakada Sadanosuke, "Shashin no shinkleioskô to sono oyû kôkoku," pp. 9–14, which further explicated the development of avant-garde photography techniques that were being applied in German advertising design, including photomontage, photographs, and x-ray photographs. Nakada's piece was followed by a series of more practical "how to" sections beginning with a contribution by the shinkô shashin photographer Kanamaru Shigene, a leading figure in photography education in Japan and the founder of a commercial photography studio involved in publicity and advertising called Kinreisha in 1926, in which the author explained the range of photographic technologies and devices currently available. Kanamaru Shigene, "Kôkokû yô shashin no seisakuhotô," pp. 14–21. Other essays explained the relationship between various printing technologies and photography, the use of airbrushing, the effectiveness of different models and locations, and the use of films in advertising.


ibid., pp. 75–6.