

A public lecture co-sponsored by the Art History Program, East Asian Studies & the Design Program

Tuesday, October 7th, 4:10 pm in Art 210D



Hannah Sigur

Japan at the International Expositions: Art, Agendas and the Birth of Modern Design

In 1873, “art” appeared in Japan. The translation into Japanese of a word—all important in that day—encountered in German at the International Exposition in Vienna, the arrival of “art” marked not the sudden dawn of aesthetics in a society that heretofore had none, but a new point of view in an ancient culture. Adopted with deliberation, “art” was indivisible from Japan’s shift away from the primeval magnetic pull of the ethos of China and outward, towards the West. But more than reflective of values newborn of radical transformation, Japan embraced “art” first and foremost as a tool—a weapon—as the nation accomplished its rise as a global competitor at the International Expositions, the acknowledged standard of the Gilded Age. Playing to win in that public arena Japan transformed itself. It also catalyzed the entire domestic visual culture of the West, and set it on a new course. In the confluences of the International Exposition, modern design was an accidental, inevitable consequence, and inseparable, from the Japanese entanglement with the concept of Art.