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TANIGUCHI, Eri. Hasegawa Saburō and the Internalized Photograph: Thoughts on His Work and Discourses from 1936 to 1940

This paper focuses on the activities of Hasegawa Saburō (1906–57) between roughly 1936 and 1940. My principal aim is to consider works that have newly come to light, together with works that are missing, to clarify his activities before the end of World War II. A second aim is to reexamine his series of “transfer paintings” (oil paintings using transfer techniques with stamps and stencils) and his series of collages, which have not been studied sufficiently, exploring the position of those works in the history of art from the perspective of their relationship to photography, taking into account Hasegawa’s discourses about art and culture. This paper discusses photography as a medium at both the literal and the metaphorical level. The term “photograph” in quotation marks indicates that broader concept.

It is common to position Hasegawa’s prewar work within a context receptive to Abstract art in Japan. But, given that there was a period in which he abandoned oil painting in favor of photographic works, Hasegawa’s work had aspects that cannot be fully accounted for by the Abstractionist context. Thus, when discussing Hasegawa, “photograph” becomes a key word in its own right, as important as “Abstract art.” When we reconsider Hasegawa’s activities in terms of this problem, we see that the “photograph” is deeply implicated not only in the transfer paintings and collages he produced before beginning to work in photography, but in his literally activities as well. If what we see in his photographic works is an externalized “photograph,” conceived as a medium of expression, then we can also see the internalized “photograph” that provided the model for his transfer paintings, collages, and writings. This paper, examining Hasegawa’s “photographs,” demonstrates that around 1936–38, Hasegawa produced transfer paintings that internalized the “photograph” as a model for image formation and, around 1937, produced collages that internalized the “photograph” as a visual model. This analytic focus seen in Hasegawa’s “photographs” was shared with artists who were his contemporaries, including Ei-Q, Yoshihara Jirō, and Murai Masanari. From this perspective, as expressive techniques, the “photographs” found in his paintings and collages anticipated the photographs he created from 1938 and beyond.

This paper also proposes a structure that links the “avant-garde” of Western origins with “tradition” in Japan and East Asia, noting the role of photographic plates in incorporating the visual language of modern photography in Hasegawa’s writings on art and culture. It demonstrates how Hasegawa’s discourse, which centered on a theory of culture that equated avant-garde with tradition, had internalized the “photograph” as a conceptual model. The same structure appears in both his collages and photographic works; that commonality demonstrates that to Hasegawa, the “photograph” nullifies the antagonism between the avant-garde and Japanese and East Asian tradition, in both style and concept. Photography thus became an indispensable technology for establishing a non-contradictory “Japanese avant-garde art.”

To Hasegawa, the “photograph” was more than a means of expression. It was a fundamental catalyst for both his creative work and thought.

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