The National Museum of Western Art

The National Museum of Western Art (NMWA) aims to provide a broad introduction to the entirety of Western art through its collection and exhibition activities. The NMWA’s collection began with the Matsumata Collection, focusing on French modern era paintings and sculptures. The Japanese industrialist Kido Matsumata (1864–1918) planned to build Japan’s first museum of Western art, and from 1914 spent a decade or so assembling a massive collection of artworks in Europe. Later, changes in his circumstances led to the majority of his collected works being scattered among other collections and his museum plans were not realized. During World War II the French government seized some 450 on the Matsumata Collection works still in France, but they were returned to the Japanese people after the war, and in 1953 the National Museum of Western Art was established to preserve and display them.

Since its opening the NMWA has received generous gifts of artworks from many individuals, including Teisuke Yamamura, Ryuzaburo Umekawa and Kenzo Tachibana, and has conducted an active acquisition program to broaden and deepen the NMWA collection. Throughout the year, the Permanent Collection Galleries display works from the NMWA collection—including Old Master paintings from the late Medieval period to the 18th century, modern paintings spanning the Realist and Impressionist movements of the latter half of the 19th century, and works from the first half of the 20th century. The Permanent display also presents examples of modern sculpture, featuring works by Auguste Rodin. Small special exhibitions on specific themes are also organized from the NMWA collection, introducing a variety of works including prints, drawings and decorative arts. Museum visitors are also invited to enjoy the related programs held in conjunction with the works and themed displays in the Permanent Collection Galleries.

The NMWA Main Building Designed by Le Corbusier

The NMWA features not only splendid artworks such as those in the Matsumata Collection, but the architecture of the building housing and displaying the collection is also a major highlight of the Museum. The Main Building opened in 1958, was designed by Le Corbusier (1887–1965), one of the masters of modern architecture active in France. It was constructed on Le Corbusier’s Museum of Collectors Growth concept, which allows for the building to expand as the collection grows. The Corbusier’s design for the Main Building is also a reflection of the theories and systems that he pursued as the basis of architecture for a new era. These concepts include his Maison Dom-ino architectural concept in which pillars, floors, stairs and other simple constructions become the basic units; his "five elements for modern architecture" brought together the architectural potential; not realizable in old European stilt architecture and the Mole’s, his proposal measuring unit aimed at harmonizing architecture with the human body.

As the NMWA collection and activities expanded, the New Wing (1972) and the Special Exhibitions Wing (1983) were added to the site, although this was not the expansion of the structure envisioned by Le Corbusier. In 1988 the present-day Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism designated the NMWA Main Building as one of the 100 Selected Public Buildings, highlighting its excellence as a public facility well-established in the local community. In 2007 the Japanese government designated the Main Building an Important Cultural Property (Architectural), and on July 16, 2016 UNESCO included the NMWA Main Building as a World Heritage site under the designation "The Architectural Work of Le Corbusier, an Outstanding Contribution to the Modern Movement". To further introduce the Main Building and its fascinating aspects as part of our cultural heritage, the NMWA has prepared a pamphlet of the NMWA facilities, and volunteer staff members lead architectural tours.

 NMWA Main Building Designed by Le Corbusier

The National Museum of Western Art

Museum Guide

http://www.nmwa.go.jp/en/

The Collection of the National Museum of Western Art

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