**The Japan Art Institute (Nihon Bijutsuin 日本美術院)**

The Japan Art Institute was a Japanese art institute focused on the teaching, research and exhibition of Nihonga-style art, established by Okakura Tenshin in 1898. Tenshin, who left the Tokyo School of Fine Arts the same year, brought along with him, notable artists like Hashimoto Gahô (橋本雅邦), Yokoyama Taikan (横山大観), Hishida Shunso(菱田春草), and Shimomura Kanzan(下村観山). In the initial years, the Institute received substantial funding from William S. Bigelow, a wealthy doctor from Boston who was a colleague of Tenshin’s. The Institute set out to focus on research, production and exhibition. Two sections were set up in order to achieve this– the first section was in charge of production of painting and crafts, while the second was preoccupied with preservation and conservation technology. It was in the first section that endeavored to create a new style of Nihonga (Japanese-style painting) in accordance with Tenshin’s ideals. In the years following 1906, the Institute ran into financial difficulties and with its main members away in foreign countries, it entered a period of hiatus.

During the early years, the Institute’s artists Taikan and Shunsô created a new style known as *môrô-tai*, or “hazy style” that was meant to depict atmosphere and light in favour of shading over line. The style was innovative and daring but drew much criticism from the painting world that viewed it as “oil painting with Japanese materials.” While the stylistic innovation failed to garner much support at home, the Institute found eager patrons in its foreign contacts, particularly the American and Western connoisseurs. From 1902 – 1905, the Institute went through a period of internationalisation where American contacts visited and members travelled abroad. This period also coincided with Tenshin’s books which were written in English. The Institute’s international exchanges lent much support to the cause of revitalising Japanese art. Today, the Institute focuses just on Nihonga with its activities revolving largely in the domestic market.

In 1914, a year after Tenshin’s passing, Taikan resurrected the Institute and created sections for Nihonga, Yôga (Western-style painting) and sculpture. Eventually, only the section for Nihonga remained and the Institute continues to hold annual exhibitions known as the *Inten*. Today, the Japan Art Institute remains one of the largest, non-governmental organisations that exerts considerable influence among Nihonga artists and the Nihonga art world.

**References and Further Reading**

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