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| Japanese Constructivism |
| (構成主義, Kōseishugi) |
| The philosophy of constructivism was introduced to Japan by Murayama Tomoyoshi (村山 知義, 1901-1977), a Japanese painter born in Tokyo and raised by a Christian mother active in the pacifist movement. Though he was initially encouraged to pursue watercolours and traditional Japanese painting, Murayama was later drawn to philosophy, particularly the works of German philosophers Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche. He converted to Christianity after being assaulted by fellow students for disseminating his mother's pacifist views. |
| The philosophy of constructivism was introduced to Japan by Murayama Tomoyoshi (村山 知義, 1901-1977), a Japanese painter born in Tokyo and raised by a Christian mother active in the pacifist movement. Though he was initially encouraged to pursue watercolours and traditional Japanese painting, Murayama was later drawn to philosophy, particularly the works of German philosophers Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche. He converted to Christianity after being assaulted by fellow students for disseminating his mother's pacifist views. Murayama entered Tokyo Imperial University in 1921 with the intention of studying philosophy, but soon left to study art and drama at the Humboldt University of Berlin, Germany. He returned from Germany in 1923 to introduce Constructivism to Japan and became one of the leaders of Japan’s avant-garde art and theatre movement. Murayama first posited his artistic theory of ‘conscious constructivism’(意識的構成主義, *ishikiteki koseishugi*) in April 1923. He championed an expansion of the subject matter of art to incorporate “the entirety of life” (全人生, zen-jinsei), which suggested the inclusion of the full range of human experiences and emotions in modern life.  The term Constructivism originated in the abstract artistic movement in Russia, but the term is used in Japan across a wide variety of academic disciplines ranging from the arts to politics, social studies and psychology, to signify the interdependence between human experience and the realm of ideas related to social norms, interests and identities. Constructivism also developed into an international aesthetic trend that espoused an avant-garde tendency in order to fulfil specific social purposes and eschew the autonomy of art. This endeavour led to several modern art movements including German Bauhaus design and the Japanese MAVO movement as an offspring also inspired by Dadaism.  Constructivists proposed to replace art’s traditional concern with composition and refocus on the process of construction itself. Constructivists were involved in the construction of a new society and it was this political and social motivation that attracted Murayama and his fellow Constructivists to the genre, and in particular the work of Wassily Kandinsky. Later, Murayama became dissatisfied with Constructivism’s detachment from reality and developed his own style by using collages of real objects to provoke concrete associations. He termed this method “conscious constructivism,” which developed into the MAVO (マヴォ) movement. The Japanese Mavoists sought to annihilate the boundaries between art and everyday life, and rebelled against convention by combining industrial products with painting or printmaking in collage. Social mobilisation was part of the movement, which engaged in artistic protests against social injustice portrayed through the use of theatrical eroticism and the mocking of public morality.  File: Murayama.jpg  Figure 1. Tomoyoshi Murayama, Construction, 1925, mixed media, The Museum of Modern Art Tokyo  Source: not provided by the author |
| Further reading:  (Bukh)  (Larking)  (Lawson and Seiko)  (Weisenfeld)  (Weisenfeld, Mayo: Japanese Artists and the Avant-garde, 1905-1931) |