



Murai Masanari, URBAIN no. 1, 1936, oil on canvas, 111.8 x 193.7 cm, the 1st Exhibition of the Free Artists Association (1937), the Museum of Modern Art, Wakayama

Sophia University Institute of Comparative Culture Lecture Series 2024

# Abstract Landscapes: Avant-garde Artists and the Negotiation of Self-Expression in Wartime Japan

**Jeongwon Yoon**

**May 23, 2024**

**18:00-19:30**

**Room 301**

**3F, Building 10**

**Sophia University**

**In person only**

**No registration**

**required**

The Tokyo-based avant-garde art group, Free Artists Association (Jiyū Bijutsuka Kyōkai, 1937–1944), was organized to promote the freedom of expression, ironically at the beginning of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945). This stark contradiction cast a long shadow over the association, causing the complex nature of the group activity. Several members once vigorously opposed any constraints on art, but they also grappled with anxiety and pressure to align with the wartime social climate. With the inconsistency in consideration, this presentation particularly examines three core members: one of the leaders, Murai Masanari (1905–1999); the Hokkaido-born artist, Koyama Noboru (1910–1941); and the Korean artist, Kim Whanki (1913–1974). By analyzing their abstract paintings depicting specific landscapes, I present how these three artists negotiated a complex dual mission—the expression of themselves and the representation of nation—amidst the growing nationalism within the Japanese art scene from the late 1930s to the early 1940s.

This talk is organized by Noriko Murai (Professor, Sophia University).

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**Jeongwon Yoon** is an ICC visiting researcher and a doctoral fellow of the Japan Foundation. She is a Ph.D. candidate in the Kress Foundation Department of Art History at the University of Kansas. Her dissertation focuses on the Free Artists Association and examines its organization, annual exhibitions, art criticism, and legacies within Japanese and Korean society prepared for full-scale war.