

Propaganda Painted by Masters: Japanese Art and Photography During the Fifteen Year War

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“Mass-produced propaganda” is not a phrase associated with exhibition-quality fine art often, or at all. The commonly held associations of propaganda in the United States include Uncle Sam, tall typography, and posters plastered and distributed everywhere in sight. State-sponsored propaganda crafts conflicting realities, realities that are evaluated afterwards as biased at best and blatant falsity at worst. This idea is especially true in wartime art that can be sorted into the narrower category of art-as-propaganda, which at first seems like a paradox. Propaganda is frequently associated with mass production, government-commissioned images, and a one-sided promotion of ideologies, while art is often associated with creativity, masterworks, and emotional gravitas. Art-as-propaganda (a term I coined to describe art commissioned by a state to have a propagandist purpose) tends to portray a reality that empowers the state first and documents the truth last. Japanese wartime art and photography exemplify the qualities of art and propaganda: while they furthered militarist ideologies, they were showcases of artistic mastery and carried deep emotional weight. They counter many Western notions of what propaganda is and what it can accomplish, including their artistic elements and their public exhibition as art during the war. They also counter notions of the supposed apolitical nature of art, and art that is truly portraying reality and truth. Indeed, they were pieces of propaganda created by masters of the Japanese art world. The mobilizing forces that spurred Japanese art-as-propaganda can be captured and analyzed to study both the art historical and historical significance of Japanese art and photography throughout the Fifteen Year War from 1931 to 1945. These mobilizing forces that helped turn artists into propagandists were highly successful, as the Japanese state met little resistance from artists throughout the war and whatever resistance there was amounted to passive resistance. Although the Japanese state favored artistic media originating in the West while documenting the Second World War, war art-as-propaganda encompassed a variety of disciplines as every aspect of the Japanese art world was collectively mobilized to promote the cultural and political ideologies fueling the war’s spiritualization and “just cause” narrative.

The embodiment of art-as-propaganda during the war was *sensōga* (戦争画, literally war painting in Japanese).¹ *Sensōga* paintings were commissioned by the Japanese state and military for display in exhibitions sponsored by the Japanese state. One of these exhibitions, celebrating the first anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attack, featured 39 paintings commissioned by the army and navy and amassed some 3.85 million visitors.² These works were also widely reproduced and published in mass media, such as newspapers and postcard reproductions.³ The majority of these paintings were *yōga* (洋画) paintings, that is, paintings painted in the Western style of oil-on-canvas.⁴ Considering Japan’s crusade against Western influences during the war, this connection between the state and an art form highly influenced by Western conventions seems ironic if not hypocritical. Why did the Japanese state value and commission works in a Western style if it seemingly went against their anti-West campaign?

¹Bert Winther-Tamaki, “Embodiment/Disembodiment: Japanese Painting During the Fifteen-Year War,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 52, no. 2 (1997): 146.

² Mayu Tsuruya, “Sensō Sakusen Kirokuga: Seeing Japan’s War Documentary Painting as a Public Monument,” in , *Since Meiji: Perspectives on the Japanese Visual Arts, 1868-2000*, ed. J. Thomas Rimer (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2012), 106.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Winther-Tamaki, “Embodiment/Disembodiment,” 146.

The answer lies in the core characteristics of yōga and Western oil painting in general. Depicting scenes with depth, perspective, and realism, yōga seemed to have more verisimilitude than its Japanese-style painting counterpart *nibonga* (日本画). Yōga paintings were celebrated by the Japanese military for their realism, a key quality for sensōga, art that was supposed to document and be a monument to the war for generations to come.⁵ These qualities eventually enabled yōga to overshadow its foreign origins and decided which medium would be used to publicly display the war to the masses. The Japanese state needed to use art to depict a new reality, one that would be immortalized primarily in the large scale works that were painted by the masters of the yōga art form.

One of these masters was Fujita Tsuguharu, one of the war’s most prolific sensōga painters. His wartime work exemplifies the qualities that the Japanese military desired in their sensōga. His painting *The Fall of Singapore* (Figure 1) depicts soldiers rendered in brown hues waiting to attack, a motif common in his wartime art. The common hue visually unites the soldiers, just as the Japanese state desired the Japanese people to be mobilized and united. The painting’s clearly defined foreground (the soldiers), middleground (the rolling hills), and background (pale blue sky covered with smoke) as well as the soldier’s gaze leads the eyes to the center of the foreground – Singapore being bombed in the distance. The sunbeam in the top left echoes the symbol of the rising sun, casting the bombing in sunlight and suggesting that the “holy war” Japanese militarists were so eager to fight.



Figure 1: *The Fall of Singapore* by Fugita Tsuguharu (1942)

The use of realism compliments artistic techniques specifically designed to emphasize the qualities desired in the Japanese military and public. In this case, the realism visibly adds authority to the propagandist undertones of the work, further cementing yōga’s role in art-as-propaganda.

A painting displaying the fall of Singapore from a different perspective – the surrender of Singapore by British forces to Japan – exposes the sources that yōga painters depended on for their depictions of battles and other wartime events. Artists relied on firsthand observation of the places where wartime events took place,⁶ soldier models,⁷ and wartime photography to develop their documentary works.⁸ The Miyamoto Saburō’s *The Meeting of General Yamashita and General Percival* (Figure 2) is an example of the last case, as it shares a high amount of similarity to *Asabi shimbun*’s photo of the same event (Figure 3). The British generals have the exact same expression, the officers

⁵ Tsuruya, “Sensō Sakusen Kirokuga,” 101.

⁶ Winther-Tamaki, “Embodiment/Disembodiment,” 152.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Kawata Akihisa, “War Art and Its Era,” trans. Aaron Hames, in *Art and War in Japan and its Empire*, ed. Asato Ikeda, Aya Louisa McDonald, and Ming Tiampo (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 33.

to General Yamashita's left side have the similar poses, and everyone featured in the photograph is easily recognizable in the painting.



Figure 2: *The Meeting of General Yamashita and General Percival* by Miyamoto Saburō (1942)



Figure 3: *Asahi shimbun* photo

Not only does this painting reveal its sources, it also marks a new phenomenon – wartime photography being present in the mass media (thus embedding itself into the minds of the general public) and then influencing the *sensōga* painted documenting the event. Although the resulting painting's originality can be questioned, its close portrayal of a scene captured on film grants its further veracity – few question the reality captured by a photograph.

These sources also influenced the small but not negligible amount of *sensōga* painted in *nihonga*, Japanese-originated ink and mineral pigment painting. *Nihonga* often lacked the characteristic depth and linear perspective that made *yōga* seem so real; instead, *nihonga* usually depicted objects from nature and figures from Japanese legend and history that lacked photographic verisimilitude.⁹ Yet, Yamaguichi Hōshun's *Final Attack on Hong Kong Island* (Figure 4) depicts Hong Kong on fire and with billows of smoke towering above the city, clearly a depiction of war. The colorful mineral and

⁹ Barbara McCloskey, *Artists of World War II* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005), 116.

water-based paints present in the Nihonga painting create a more vivid color contrast than the oil-painted yōga paintings of Fujita Tsuguharu and Miyamoto Saburo.



Figure 4: Postcard of *Final Attack on Hong Kong Island* by Yamaguichi Hōshun (1942)

The painting’s undeniable beauty and vivid color scheme are precisely the problem: contemporaneous Japanese critics criticized the paintings for beautifying the war.¹⁰ Other critics questioned if the very nature of nihonga allowed a nihonga painting to be painted on a canvas (traditionally nihonga works are painted on scrolls and folding screens) and judged that the resulting sensōga was inferior to yōga because of its lack of realism.¹¹

These negative reactions can be largely attributed to the characteristics of nihonga that prevented it from being an ideal medium for creating sensōga. Its theatrical color scheme derived from mineral pigment paints was not the sole setback, as its defining characteristics as an artistic medium restricted its use for portraying acts of war. Yamaguichi Hōshun’s own teacher, Matsuoka Eikyū, stated that the “realistic documentary of the war is best left to the news photograph and film...If you have to represent warfare of today in *nihonga* painting [...] you will foreclose the life of the painting as *nihonga*.”¹² Since the Meiji period, nihonga had steered away from realism, naturalistic tendencies, and current events or culture, and instead focused on creating nostalgic artwork portraying Japanese or Asian tradition.¹³

This style of Nihonga was best realized in the artwork of Yokoyama Taiken, one of the most famous and prolific nihonga painters during this time. His 1940 work, *Mt. Fuji* (Figure 5), exemplifies his goals of using spirituality and symbols to set Japanese artwork apart from Western artwork, which he viewed as materialistic.¹⁴ He uses the traditional Japanese symbols of the rising sun and Mount Fuji to communicate his support for the war and Japanese nationalism without depicting a realistic battle scene that was the standard in sensōga. His use of subdued clouds in the bottom of the painting, preventing the bottom of Mount Fuji from being visible, lends the painting

¹⁰ Winther-Tamaki, “Embodiment/Disembodiment,” 157.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Matsuoka Eikyū, “Nihonga ni okeru Sensōga” in *Toei* 13:11 (1937), reprinted in SK, 86, quoted in Winther-Tamaki, “Embodiment/Disembodiment,” 157. Source was originally printed in Japanese, translation care of Bert Winter-Tamaki.

¹³ Winther-Tamaki, “Embodiment/Disembodiment,” 155.

¹⁴ Ibid., 161.

a great deal of atmosphere, and overall the paintings gives off a feeling of the elevated Japanese spirituality for which Yokoyama so strived for.



Figure 5: *Mt. Fuji* by Yokoyama Taiken (1940)

Yokoyama would become the most prolific painter of Mt. Fuji during the war, but intriguingly never painted the mountain from firsthand observation, feeling that the technique would disrupt the spirituality, his ultimate goal.¹⁵ Nihonga was thus less likely to be a medium of *sensōga* than *yōga*, both because of its lack of realism and its artistic tradition. This adherence to artistic tradition prevented nihonga artists from even making uncommissioned illustrations of the war because the resulting artwork was criticized for its content as well as its artistic elements. These stylistic decisions were not dictated by the Japanese government, as Yamaguichi Hōshun's *sensōga*, *Final Attack on Hong Kong Island*, demonstrates, but were a choice made by the artists themselves. The artists' freedom to define nihonga in a time period where the art world was being supervised by the Japanese state at a never-before-seen level is impressive compared to *yōga* artists during the same time period. Whether nihonga painters were afforded more autonomy because of the lack of government demand for nihonga or because of the government granting influential nihonga painters freedom to have stylistic opinions does not have a clear answer, and would be a fertile ground for future research.

The third medium that was mobilized by the Japanese state during this time was photography, more specifically photojournalism, which served as propaganda to communicate anti-West attitudes. Photojournalism arose in the days predating the height of the war through the creation of photojournalism magazines such as *Nippon*, which was founded by Natori Yōnosuke. Aiming to promote Japan to Western audiences, the magazine was created amidst uncertainty about Japan's place in foreign relations following its 1933 departure from the League of Nations.¹⁶ *Nippon* aimed to present Japan not from the Orientalist view common in Western media, but as a country whose cultural and societal qualities allowed it to excel as a modern nation-state.¹⁷ This explains why images both of traditional geisha and of Japanese soldiers could be found within *Nippon*, as illustrations of

¹⁵ Ibid., 160.

¹⁶ Andrea Germer, "Visual Propaganda in Wartime East Asia: The Case of Natori Yōnosuke," *The Asia-Pacific Journal Vol 9, Issue 20* (2011), <http://japanfocus.org/-andrea-germer/3530/article.html>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

both rich Japanese tradition and military might forwarded the magazine's goals.¹⁸ However, *Nippon* ultimately became a state-supported propaganda entity, at first sponsored by the KBS (*Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai*, or Society for International Cultural Relations) and after the start of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937 (only three years after the magazine started being published) *Nippon's* production costs were fully covered by the Japanese state.¹⁹ Natori Yōnosuke would become something of a propaganda artist as he exercised considerable influence in *Nippon's* editing, photography, and graphic design.²⁰

Another example of such a state-serving magazine was *Front*, founded in 1942 and published through a vessel of the army's General Staff office. The staff of *Front* saw photographs not as documented reality but images meant to be manipulated into graphics to be processed by the general population.²¹ Other photo magazines such as *Shashin shūbō* ("Photo Weekly" in Japanese) were circulated through neighborhood associations.²² With publication coming under direct control and support of the Japanese state, the main venues where both Japanese and non-Japanese would encounter Japanese photography used art to fuel a nationalist narrative. Instead of using photojournalism to portray the Japanese cultural and military reality, these magazines captured images and designed spreads that were intended to illustrate the Japanese state's power, strength, and modernity. Perhaps ironically, this occurred through the usage of a discipline that originated in the West, like the state-funded art exhibitions that featured *sensōga*. Furthermore, as illustrated by Miyamoto Saburo's *The Meeting of General Yamashita and General Percival*, photographs captured the public imagination to such a degree that *sensōga* paintings themselves were based on them. Even the artist Fugita Tsuguharu consulted combat photographs in the making of his wartime art.²³ However, possibly the most important and innovative photography during this period was not published in these magazines and instead was captured on the outskirts of the mobilized Japanese photographic world.

Realism, the core quality of *yōga* painting that made it valuable as *sensōga*, was the spark of photographic resistance that aimed to capture and document the Japanese social reality instead of mere propaganda fodder. Some photographers for the photo magazines *Nippon* and *Front*, namely Domon Ken and Hamaya Hiroshi, resigned to document traditional Japanese ways of life such as Bunraku puppet theater and culture in northern Japan.²⁴ The most prominent example of capturing social reality is in the works that stemmed from the collaboration of the Tampei Photography Club led by Yasui Nakaji: the *Wandering Jew* series (Figure 6). Depicting Polish Jewish refugees at a relocation center in Kōbe,²⁵ the series of photographs captures a Japanese social reality that would have never be seen in the likes of *Nippon* and is a key exception in a photographic age dominated by photojournalism and propaganda.

¹⁸ *Nippon* photographs published in Kaneko Ryūichi, "Realism and Propaganda: The Photographer's Eye Trained on Society," in *A History of Japanese Photography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

¹⁹ Germer, "Visual Propaganda in Wartime East Asia."

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ryūichi, "Realism and Propaganda," 192.

²² Ibid.

²³ McCloskey, *Artists of World War II*, 117.

²⁴ Ryūichi, "Realism and Propaganda", 192-193.

²⁵ Ibid.



Figure 6: *Nap* by Shiihara Osamu from the series *Wandering Jew* (1941)

Despite these outliers of photographic innovation, the rest of the Japanese art world was mobilized to create art-as-propaganda to further the state narrative. In an age where everyone in the Japanese nation was expected to contribute to the war, artists faced increased supervision, organization, and collectivization or were labeled a “luxury” and one of the remnants of Western materialism. The Army Art Association, founded in 1939, was the organization with which the majority of artists working with the military collaborated.²⁶ It was legally independent from the state on paper, but in practice was supervised by the Army Information Division.²⁷ Primarily made up of yōga painters, the Association also had a few nihonga painters in its ranks, demonstrating that both disciplines were directly mobilized.²⁸ The navy and air force also had their own associations, and Fujita Tsuguharu, prolific as he was, worked with all three branches of the military during the war.²⁹ Traveling with combat troops, some 300 artists (not near the total number of artists in Japan) worked for the military during this time,³⁰ and only a relatively small number of artists benefitted from military commissions, with younger artists and art students suffering the greatest effects from conscription and art rationing.³¹ By 1944, 75% of the students at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts had been conscripted into the Japanese military not to be artists, but soldiers.³²

As the Pacific War called for an even stronger cultural attack on the West, these art associations came to control most every aspect of the Japanese art world. Artists such as Yokoyama Taiken even took a leadership role in the state art organizations, as Taiken led the Patriotic Society of Japanese Art.³³ Created in 1943 by the Ministry of Education, the Patriotic Society of Japanese Art required membership of every Japanese artist, and in 1944 took over all exhibition activity.³⁴ Photographers were likewise mobilized, embedded in combat units and trained for a variety of tasks ranging from documentation to intelligence gathering.³⁵ There was no Army Art Association equivalent for photographers, but the military also came to depend on studios and external photography agencies

²⁶ Michael Lucken, “Total Unity in the Mirror of Art,” trans. Francesca Simkin, in *Art and War in Japan and Its Empire*, ed. Asato Ikeda, Aya L. McDonald, and Ming Tiampo (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 82.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ McCloskey, *Artists of World War II*, 115.

³¹ Lucken, “Total Unity in the Mirror of Art”, 82.

³² Ibid.

³³ McCloskey, *Artists of World War II*, 117.

³⁴ Ibid., 117-118.

³⁵ Lucken, “Total Unity in the Mirror of Art”, 82.

to produce propaganda and poster campaigns.³⁶ The previously discussed Nippon Kōbō, the agency behind *Nippon*, and Tōhō-sha, the vessel of the army's General Staff office behind *Front*, are two such examples.³⁷ Other photographers were mobilized in the homeland, such as Ishikawa Kōyō, who was a member of the photography unit in the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department and famously was the only known photographer to capture the immediate aftermath of the Tokyo fire raids.³⁸

This unprecedented mobilization of various artistic disciplines made a marked impression in the minds of artists of the day. Maruki Iri and Maruki Toshi were two such artists. In the oral history, *Japan at War*, Maruki Iri begins their account by stating, "Painters were forced to paint pictures that supported the war," and Maruki Toshi continues, "They wouldn't give us any art supplies. Those who drew war pictures received money, paints, brushes."³⁹ Later on, Toshi confirms the conscription of art school students and graduates and describes the horrible conditions that faced artists that found themselves in prison.⁴⁰ Overall, their account of being artists during the war illustrates the restrictions and conditions artists faced with the mobilization of the art world. Even as artists who opposed the war and who did not paint sensōga, Toshi says, "We didn't resist. At least not enough to be thrown into a cell. We didn't resist openly."⁴¹ This passive resistance exemplified the minimal resistance against the Japanese state in the art world where state involvement dramatically increased during the war years.

The conditions impeding resistance included imprisonment, rationing, and the benefits of painting state-commissioned artwork. Imprisonment of artists seen as members of the proletarian movement or communist sympathizers began in 1928, slowed from 1934 to 1940, and continued at the beginning of the Pacific War with arrests of members of avant-garde movements and surrealists.⁴² One of the Japanese state's unique duplicities during the war was the labeling of art as a luxury and the usage of art for propaganda purposes – hence the rationing of art supplies. Although artwork was exempt under the Ban on Production and Sale of Luxury Articles issued in 1940, various art organizations complained about and campaigned against metal, canvas, and oil paint shortages.⁴³ Due to this rationing nihonga painters were dramatically undersupplied, as only a fraction of them were on the 1944 Japanese Regulatory Association of Arts and Crafts' official list of artists allowed to receive art supplies.⁴⁴ If an artist was willing and able to work with branches of the Japanese military, advantages abounded, including safe passage through Japanese occupied territory, participation in the well-attended sensōga exhibitions, and wide reproduction of their work through mass media such as posters and postcards.⁴⁵ If an artist was offered the opportunity to paint war art and agreed to document the war with their artistic abilities (as many did) the visibility gained would have been invaluable. Artists such as Fujita Tsuguharu were able to reap the profits of selling non-sensōga works for high prices due to their newfound Japanese-state-supported fame.⁴⁶ The obvious benefits of painting sensōga were even confirmed by Maruki Iri and Maruki Toshi, who stated that

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 83.

³⁸ "Chronology," in *A History of Japanese Photography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 323.

³⁹ Maruki Iri and Maruki Toshi, interview by Haruko Taya Cook and Theodore F. Cook, in *Japan at War: An Oral History* (New York: The New Press, 1992), 253.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 254.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Lucken, "Total Unity in the Mirror of Art," 80.

⁴³ Akihisa, "War Art and Its Era," 31.

⁴⁴ Lucken, "Total Unity in the Mirror of Art," 83.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 82.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

when one of their artist colleagues received a state commission, “you just felt happy they could eat”⁴⁷ and that “There was lots of work for painters in the army. Painters got officer treatment, even those who weren’t very good at painting.”⁴⁸

Despite the harrowing situation during the Japanese art world, there was passive resistance to be found, as already demonstrated through Maruki Iri and Maruki Toshi. Some yōga painters, such as Matsumoto Shunsuke (who during the war painted a large number of self-portraits and cityscapes), remained outside of the state-controlled Japanese art and exhibition world.⁴⁹ Despite his nationalist tendencies, he argued for artistic freedom in the face of the increased commissioning of art-as-propaganda and that artistic freedom itself was a Japanese ideal instead of one originating from the materialistic culture of the West.⁵⁰ However, regardless of these outliers, the Japanese art world experienced no great public outrage over the national philosophy of increased collectivization and Pan-Asianism from 1941 onwards.⁵¹ The painters in the art world were thus less successful at resisting the painting of the “just cause” narrative than their photographer counterparts who chose to capture social reality rather than staged propaganda images.

How did all this mobilization serve to fuel a “just cause” narrative, the narrative that promoted sending soldiers into war and ultimately led to the creation of the Kamikaze? Later in the war, soldiers came to be portrayed as noble sacrifices, best illustrated by *Attack on Nanyuan* by Miyamoto Saburō (where one soldier proudly carries the Japanese flag into battle) and the wounded soldiers that Fujita Tsuguharu often featured in his paintings.⁵² Agreeing with the rhetoric that a life sacrificed for Japan and the Emperor is a worthy death, this portrayal of soldiers was in line with the ideology that came to prominence in the late Pacific War that birthed the Kamikaze and kaiten pilots. Furthermore, war paintings were often worshipped or at least treated with reverence at exhibitions. In the case of Fujita Tsuguharu’s *Last Stand on Attu* an offertory box was placed beside it and viewers bowed, kneeled and prayed before the sight of it.⁵³ Finally, the works were marketed as being viewed and inspected by the emperor, empress, or other imperial family members prior to public display.⁵⁴ So effective was this tactic that it dramatically increased the importance of these sensōga to the Japanese public and viewing the works in person became a great honor.⁵⁵ The spiritualization of these paintings furthered their purpose as art-as-propaganda: by becoming holy objects viewed by the emperor himself, the viewing of these paintings became a spiritual experience that promoted state Shinto and validated their existence as artwork. Instead of worshipping Western masterpieces such as the revered *Mona Lisa*, Japanese citizens were steered to worship the works of the artists of their homeland that promoted the values that the Japanese imperial and militarist systems wanted to instill in their people, and in the end that transcended any medium or discipline that the work of art utilized to communicate.

Both photography and sensōga were seen everywhere, from exhibitions in the formal art world to photo magazines publishing propaganda. They exemplify the idea of works of art being utilized to further the narrative of the war and pro-militarist and pro-emperor ideas. In the end, instead of serving as monuments of soldiers’ sacrifice they came to be seen as monuments of Japanese militarism, and a comprehensive exhibition of sensōga has never been displayed in a museum inside

⁴⁷ Maruki Iri and Maruki Toshi, interview by Haruko Taya Cook and Theodore F. Cook, 255.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 256.

⁴⁹ Winther-Tamaki, “Embodiment/Disembodiment,” 170.

⁵⁰ McCloskey, *Artists of World War II*, 122.

⁵¹ Lucken, “Total Unity in the Mirror of Art,” 81.

⁵² See Figure 7 and Figure 8.

⁵³ Akihisa, “War Art and Its Era,” 34.

⁵⁴ Tsuruya, “Sensō Sakusen Kirokuga,” 106.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

or outside of Japan.⁵⁶ However, their contributions to the history of Japanese art cannot be ignored. The embrace of yōga painting in the war period ushered in the age of modernism for Japan after the war as its art world became increasingly globalized. Also, the group of wartime photographers who embraced social reality created a precedent that would usher in the postwar photo-realism movement.⁵⁷ Their resistance to the propagandist photojournalism of their day illustrates the innovation that can result from challenging mobilizing forces, but the passive resistance of their many painter counterparts demonstrates how mobilization can hinder artistic innovation. Finally, wartime sensōga paintings stand as evidence for how art be mobilized to promote ideals of the state, a trend seen among both the Axis and Allied powers during World War II. As the masterworks they are, these paintings serve as mirrors into a reality that existed in the minds of wartime Japanese and stand as a memory of a war distorted by state ideologies and militarism. Their duplicity as both art and propaganda in many ways is a conflicting reality in itself, but altogether an important one. As propaganda these works illustrate that propaganda is not always conventional or easy to define, and that propaganda can in fact be idolized. As art they introduce a conversation about the role art plays in portraying reality or truth and that art is not always apolitical. Either way, these paintings document a state mobilizing its resources and population to launch itself into the face of war and how that state was able to push its population further and further into the face of the enemy.

⁵⁶ Akihisa, "War Art and Its Era," 37.

⁵⁷ Ryūichi, "Realism and Propaganda," 193.

Additional Artwork



Figure 7: *Last Stand on Attu* by Fugita Tsuguharu (1943)



Figure 8: *Attack on Nanyuan* by Miyamoto Saburō (1941)

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