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Kerry Ross, Photography for Everyone: The Cultural Lives of Cameras and Consumers in Early Twentieth-Century Japan

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Citation: Nagahara, Hiromu. "Kerry Ross, Photography for Everyone: The Cultural Lives of Cameras and Consumers in Early Twentieth-Century Japan" Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 256 Pp. \$24.95, ISBN 978-0804795647 Publication Date: June 2015." *History: Reviews of New Books*, vol. 44, no. 6, Nov. 2016, pp. 179–179.

As Published: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03612759.2016.1224014>

Publisher: Taylor & Francis

Persistent URL: <http://hdl.handle.net/1721.1/116313>

Version: Author's final manuscript: final author's manuscript post peer review, without publisher's formatting or copy editing

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Review of Kerry Ross, *Photography for Everyone: The Cultural Lives of Cameras and Consumers in Early Twentieth-Century Japan* (Stanford University Press, 2015)

Before Canon and Nikon became global brands—and long before photographers like Moriyama Daidō and Araki Nobuyoshi rose to prominence in the eyes of critics and curators across the world—a vibrant culture of amateur photography had already emerged in Japan during the early decades of the twentieth century. Kerry Ross' *Photography for Everyone* introduces the readers to the world that pre-1945 Japanese amateur photographers would have encountered themselves, going into the shops where they bought their cameras and beyond. As such, it is a welcome addition to the historiography of Japanese photography, which, as Ross points out, has tended to focus more on art photography and works of major auteurs. Instead, this book seeks to highlight the significance of not only amateur photography but also of processes like camera production, retail, and marketing in the making of Japan's photographic culture (3-5). By focusing on the overwhelmingly male-dominated world of amateur photography in prewar Japan, *Photography for Everyone* also draws our attention to the ways in which camera makers, retailers, and publishers envisioned the middle-class, male consumer during a historical period that has been better known for the rise of their female counterparts.

The book's chief strength lies in its description of the multi-layered infrastructure that constituted the amateur photographer's world. This starts with the "department store of photography" (21) in the Nihonbashi district of Tokyo, opened in 1916 by the camera producer and retailer Konishi Roku (the present-day Konica Minolta). Ross walks us through the store, which boasted the latest advancements in retail methods, including attractive show windows, an escalator, and multiple telephone lines that customers could use to reach the store, all of which were meant to ease the access of an increasing number of customers to photography. At the same time, Ross highlights how the same retailers constructed a highly gendered categorization of their customers, in which the male consumers were envisioned to be dedicated hobbyists, defined by their mastery over the entire photographic process from taking shots to processing film and producing prints, while women and children tended to be associated with the more "casual photographers" (48), who were expected not only to leave the developing and printing to professional photo labs but also were seen to be capable of handling only the simpler cameras. The male hobbyists were, in contrast, expected to avail themselves of a growing number of resources to further their photographic pursuits, including photography journals and instruction manuals that were produced by prominent photographers and other promoters of photography, local and national photography clubs, as well as photo contests sponsored by leading journals, camera makers and others companies. Ross argues that these resources not only enabled amateur photographers to improve on their skills but also served to articulate an increasingly shared set of ideas that defined middle-class masculinity. These included emphasis on technical mastery,

aesthetic values that stood in contrast to the elite modernist photographers, and even experimentations with democratic practices in the context of club activities.

Relying primarily on documents produced by camera manufacturers and retailers, photographic journals, and published writings by well-known promoters of photography as hobby, *Photography for Everyone* does not include much in the way of analysis of contemporary writings or subsequent memoirs by the individual, amateur photographers themselves. Though the book does engage in sustained analyses of the bylaws created by amateur photography clubs as well as some photographic works produced by amateur photographers, almost all of these sources are considered in the context of their appearance in the pages of major photographic journals. This raises some questions regarding the identity and agency of the amateur photographers as well as the roles played by photographic journals and other institutions in mediating their ‘voice.’ In what ways—and to what extent—was the ideal of the male, hobbyist photographer, along with the accompanying ideas regarding middle-class masculinity, actually internalized by these individuals? To what extent can cultural gatekeepers like manufacturers, retailers, journals, and promoters of popularization of photography mentioned in the book, such as Fukuhara Shinzō or Suzuki Hachirō, be trusted to speak for the amateur photographers in regards to their tastes, motivations, and desires? While these questions perhaps suggest avenues for further research, *Photography for Everyone* offers an informative account not only for the historians of Japanese photography but also for those interested in the prehistory of contemporary Japan’s vibrant photographic culture.

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