

TALK FORUM [PART II]**at the exhibition "Public Art Now", Aichi Arts Center, 1992****A lecture given by Yoshio Kitayama on November 13, 1992**

I would like to tell you a little about my personal history as an artist before showing slides of my works, because important issues, which led me to my current work, are to be found there.

I started drawing, or rather scribbling, in my childhood, but studied fine arts such as oil painting, sculpture, plaster bust sketching, etching, and suiboku-ga (Japanese ink painting) at school. Then I worked as a yu-zen kimono patternner. Though I did not see kimono patterns quite as fine art, the experience gave me some useful lessons on questions of colour. It also taught me to express myself in two and three dimensions, and to proceed from realism to abstraction.

I imitated works of the "mono" group, now past its peak, and studied conceptual art. In other words, I hurried through lessons on the history of Western art like many before me to gain some insight into Western culture. My experience thus parallels the way in which Japanese fine arts have developed since the eighteenth century. Without dwelling too long on any one, we have passed on to modern art.

It was not until I reached modern art that I really started to become aware of, and feel an interest in, fine arts. And by the time I became aware of them, the fine art movement was already in existence. Imitations and epigones had entered my world, and become a wall to be torn down. It was seeing pictures by my children and living together with them that enabled me to discover a new style of expression that differed from my previous studies and lessons. I was struck by the feeling that we were always living the present moment and that an undiscovered tomorrow was waiting to come into our lives.

I came to realize that their verbal everyday life is dynamically connected with how they perceive their world. Objects stay in one place and are inseparable from words, and this brought me to a point where I could encounter objects, words

and myself all together.

Although I had always been immersed in the history of fine art, my art really started from that point. Haeckel says, in his theory about the basic principles of biological generation, that “the generation of an individual always follows that of a prototype.” I think this applies equally to the artist. He can achieve individuality only after systematic study, just as a man is generated only after many repetitions of the prototype.

At first, I tried to shut out everything I had learned previously, and I started to draw just simple lines. These were just scribbles that might have been made by anybody. Nevertheless the lines in my pictures were not those of an innocent child. I felt I was being watched by someone, and that I was being guided to draw good and natural lines. The pristine relationship between the world and me had been spoiled by my systematic training. Now, as I tried hard to establish myself as an individual artist, I realized that the world and I had become equal partners. I was an adult and could never return to my childhood.

Lines alone can never be a work of art. But I could see something in them. Myself of that moment was expressed in those lines. I could gaze at them vacantly and innocently. The lines could jump, vanish into a far away space, or move vertically, horizontally or forwards in silence. I could also imagine a softness or strength in the lines. I could imagine these scribbled lines to be made of certain materials, and so they became lines made of iron, twigs, or bamboo.

I did an upper relief painting above a lower line drawing. I used materials such as objects abandoned by the roadside, anything that came to hand. The line drawing underneath was the unconscious work of an innocent child; the upper painting represented the conscious work of an adult. Finally, my systematic training and my traditional study of the colours of the *yu-zen* were integrated for the first time in my life. The various systems, which had been generated, appeared together on a single surface. My work has been evolving in this way ever since.

I gradually rounded off the edges of my square canvas, because that shape

seemed to be merely a preconception of the fine arts. The lower line drawing drew close to the upper, and the upper got bigger and spread onto walls and the floor. Then some separated parts of the upper fell onto the floor. Although the line drawing continued to be, the fallen upper drawing became free of the line drawing, and even totally independent of it. The upper did not need the lower any more, and started to take on freely its own original form and colours.

I feel that the upper took off from my past background towards the future. When this upper part lands on a floor, it gains weight as time passes by. It does not consist of lines any more. It is more like a material with the weight of a tree, while the upper drawing, which landed on the wall, becomes a solid object, coloured and with space inside it. It was merely a structure at first, but becomes a form with a thick bamboo trunk, seeming to explode in pieces towards the outside. Since it is a collective form made of bamboo and paper, it is very light with a less massive appearance. The time spent on a work is inversely proportional to its volume. The light form imparts a sense of floating, and changes its place in the air when hung from a thread.

When it comes to physical properties, the air has a much greater capacity than spaces on walls or floors. It is a void space difficult to perceive as having any tangible existence. Of course it is still surrounded by wall, floor, and ceiling, but I think it is a place very close to abstraction. My work wanders through the air, free from restriction. Without the pressure of gravity, space becomes denser. Release from gravity makes the relationship between work and place vague, and in turn makes it easy to move from concrete space to abstract and imaginative space. That space could also be said to be a picture.

I painted a tiny picture on a big canvas. Since it has no shadow, it seems to be floating in a massive space on the canvas. In some pictures of that time I painted a sort of star shape like a lump of earth. This lump was painted in dots, and the accumulation of the dots became a mass of surfaces of the dot. I discovered that this lump was not only the theme of my painting, but also that of the development of my own self. The mass started to have the same accumulation of star-shaped short lines. Then it became a picture of a mass with three concentric circles. When the picture

was covered with these short lines leaving no empty spaces, the world of the picture was closed according to one order of things.

A new world cannot be started without opening the closed. So I lit a mosquito-coil and scattered pieces of it onto the picture in order to make innumerable small holes, and I also set fire to the picture directly to make big holes. It took me several days work to fill the whole white area with black colour. I found self-liberation to some extent in setting fire to the canvas and making holes in this way.

The theme of my pictures is to show how my self develops its own world, as I stated at the beginning. When I was born, the world already existed. I see it as a blank canvas. When I appeared on the canvas, I was just a dot. I could begin only from that dot. The dot would become a line, a surface, then a mass. Once the canvas becomes covered with my own self, the canvas starts to recompose itself, adjust itself and parts of it integrate with one another. When one of these “lumps” of my self achieves self-realization, then it becomes possible to see inside and outside of it, and its place becomes clear. Then it is taken back into my self and becomes part of a larger self. This repetitive process is both my life and the life of man.

The form of my work moves from a dot to a dot, from a dot to a line, from a line to a surface, and from a surface to a mass, then those scattered aspects are integrated into a mass. The mass expands. When the expansion reached its peak, then it starts to shrink. Form has such a rhythm. This rhythm is not intentional: it just happens naturally. I feel the rhythm is a programmed rule of form. In spite of the fact that I came into the world, with my intention to create, after the world had already begun, I feel that my work moves in the same direction as the world.