

Mizugatari (Water Telling)

Yasue Kodama

We are approaching that place again. It is a comfortable place, as if swaying in a crib while the senses are still undifferentiated, a place that we draw near to, but are not permitted to stay.

On the flip side, it is a place like a steep cliff; a place where one must take a leap to the other side.

I entered the world of painting in the early 1980's, going against the current of the times, painting ordinary things like rocks and glass bottles that tell me that something physical exists, as if trying to capture their existence by delicately and meticulously painting them. After coming in contact with the work of Giorgio Morandi, my interest shifted towards what is happening in the picture itself rather than the subject I was painting. Eventually any specific imagery disappeared from the picture, and it began shifting towards an obscure space created by layers of minimal colors and bright greys, where subjects, the space and shadows between objects, and the space surrounding them became equalized.

With the conflicting desire to remain in that place where I had arrived, and the urge to further pursue the potential of painting, I picked up the paint and canvas in front of me, and took a step forward in my exploration of painting.

Since then, I feel that I have always been unconsciously moving closer to that obscure expanse, and each time pushed forth into uncharted territory, whether it was when I went from abstract painting, where the focus was on what was happening on the canvas, back to representational painting in order to find out the world and others' gazes, or when I shifted my consciousness of "sight" from the epistemology of perception to the "gaze at presence," or when I deepened my pursuit from Kehai to *Deep Rhyme*.

Since 2009, I have worked with the theme "Deep Rhyme: Unknowable presence showing rapport with shade and depth."

Working with unordinary sights perceived from familiar and transient natural elements, such as groves and the water's edge, and reflecting those feelings registered before these scenes are recognized consciously, on the act and form of painting, I experiment with how to make the

shades and depth, revealed by these “unknowable presences” that we as modern-day people tend to forget, shown abstractly through painting. That form differs from motif to motif, but are painted with multiple layers to achieve a depth and nuance. I layer colors that give depth, such as blues and greens, and colors that seem to come from the depths towards the surface, such as yellows and pinks, and then take my time in depicting the scene. The top most layer is finished by laying the canvas down horizontally on the ground, slightly diluting the paint and applying it all over the entire image. Then, in the short window of time available until the volatile oil dries, I quickly paint, recalling the feeling I had when I saw the scene. I capture the depth and nuance through the physical effects of the paint, as it smudges, mixes, and is scraped off by the brush. For *Deep Rhyme: Rain*, I paint as if I am shifting what I previously painted, covering the entirety of the image and repeating, in order to translate the perception into a painting.

“Deep rhyme” is a term coined by the poet and literary critic, Akiko Kawakita. It is as if the sensitivity from my work is now translated from painting into language, and the depth of the word then inspires the painting into maturity.

Although a physical surface exists, an illusion obliterates that surface by expanding the space from the surface to the depths, or from the surface towards the viewer. By highlighting the characteristics of abstraction within the representational painting and consider it as a creative language by painting figure and ground in an equal way by painting the entirety with an even stroke, critically analyzes the formalist-centered standards of painting. I believe that I currently stand in a place that attempts to find clues of what defines “painting,” and that place is within the sphere of modernism to provide a clue to transcend modernism.

Looking back, my work *Watatsumi* that I made in 2011 was different from my normal subject matter, but it was a significant encounter for my practice going forward. It is nearly impossible to paint life and nothingness, and the sea, which contains every form and color there is. But if there is something that can be brought forth from the conflict of the conscious intent to do so and the entrusting of oneself to nature and the senses, the paint on the surface of the canvas can transcend being a simple physical element, and become an opportunity to guide the viewer’s consciousness towards the depth of existence. The process I choose to work with abstracts the ambiguous presence through exploring the moment that the image, constructed physically by the layers of paint, transforms into light. Rather than be tossed about by those uncertain elements, I watch over it, and place my chips in the confidence I put in them.

It relates to the theme of *Deep Rhyme – the note of water* that began in 2013 and continues to the present. The surroundings of the university at which I work, which stands atop a hill, is a thicket that does not give the feeling of depth. One rainy winter day, the area was instantly covered in a deep fog, the overlapping branches melted into the scenery, and the view was obstructed. But the rain and fog filled the space, and I felt a physical sense of isolation, while simultaneously feeling comforted as though I was being wrapped up by the world. On an early mid-winter's morning, the surface of the water froze in the form of the ripples, perhaps due to the early morning wind that blew over the lake for a moment. Another time the snow on the frozen lake became like sleet, and faintly reflected the surrounding scenery. These sights allow me to feel the sense of presence although my actual vision may be obstructed by the natural phenomena.

In order to depict water as the symbol of presence within the depth of the unknown, I layer the paint over and over again. I take plenty of time with the bottom layers to depict the scene, and for the top layer I incorporate finer details and finish it with a layer over the entire painting, in a way that the scene renders itself from the depths of the paint. I felt that with just paint it was missing something (perhaps because it was too much of an illusion), so I added a little pearl powder. The palpable existence of water and the perception of the impalpable presence is found between the physical and the image. This is perhaps what painting means to me.

And as if having a premonition of getting closer to that place again, confirming it, avoiding it, I shake up my line of vision.

Upon seeing the form of the Yamafuji flower, it felt to me as if colors were dripping from the sky. In *Fujishigure* (2014), I intend to evoke the colors of the paint before the illusion of the flowers.

Hanatagae (2015): When one has a nightmare, and casts a spell for good luck so that it doesn't come true, the act is called "yumetageae," or "yumetagai." The word "tagae," or the verb form "tagaeru," means something like "shuffling [the circumstances] to turn the bad luck into good luck." It is seen as a pointless act in our modern society, but I want to confront what cannot be explained by science and rationalism and abstract it through painting, for example how we blend and shake up truth and falsehood to arrive at the essence of the presence of a flower. The bush clover, swaying in the wind and rain, and the bush clover and sky that is reflected in the water blurs the boundaries between the figures. However, as that blurring makes the presence stand out,

I attempted to abstract the brink of physical and the illusion, color and light through painting. I can say that I've reaffirmed that "painting" is born in the depth of painting, in the process of creating and deconstructing an image.

This time around, it may have been very deliberate.

Deep Rhyme – whiteout is specifically based on a snowscape (that which is hidden by the fallen snow, and that which appears from the falling snow).

Where I live in the city of Kyoto, there are a few days out of the year where the area is covered in white snow. The everyday scenery is homogenized by the layer of snow, and while there is some unease in losing the sense of distance and scale to which we've become accustomed, there is something that feels good about feeling as if you are enveloped in an extraordinary and innocent world.

I overlay that somatic sensation and the act of painting, entrust myself to the subject, and painted the figure which is then erased physically by the paint and brush, and layered the images that come up through this process.

If one does not try to paint, the scene cannot manifest itself, but the more one tries to paint, the further they get from the scene that they are actually perceiving. So I add the process of erasing at that point. That is primarily an act to liberate myself from self-consciousness, but this time, I was required to deliberately go forward until I reached a point of destruction.

Perhaps the snow, which not only obstructs the field of vision, but erases sound, made me become more conscious of my own presence.

As I confront what is happening in the canvas, as the act of painting and the physical phenomena of the paint conflict with each other, I am engulfed by an absolute presence, as if standing in a forest in a heavy snowfall.

It arrives many a time, in spirals, as if swaying in a crib while the senses are still undifferentiated, a place that we draw near to, but are not permitted to stay.

On the flip side, it is a place like a steep cliff; a place where one must take a leap to the other side.

From Yasue Kodama, "Deep Rhyme", MEM, 2018, translated by Kumiko Kato, Kasumi Iwama (Penguin Translation)