

## AJ Forum No. 2

# Modern Cities and Art: Imaging of Tokyo in 21st Century

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### Hozu Yamamoto (Director, Tokyo-Gallery)

#### Introduction

Recently art seems to be taking on aspects of a surrogate war between cities. This is a war where cities compete to see how much talent they can collect and how they can build top world art markets. Commercialization was the highlight of 20<sup>th</sup> century art. The power of assets for art products played an important role in the century. Art, such as works by Picasso, has been exchanged in business repeatedly over long periods of time, bringing large flows of money. Such an exchange value for art would be the most significant theme in 20<sup>th</sup> century art.

The commercialization of art means the following two aspects: one aspect is that art becomes open to the public and reachable for everyone with the resources to buy art. Before the French Revolution, only certain people at a certain level in society had cared about specific pictures. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, art spread to the public. The spread would mean the collapse of an elite status for parts of society after the revolution. The second aspect is that the industrial revolution brought mass production and added value, as well as the development of logistics. The second aspect contributed to the commercialization of art. This development affected the cities of the world, globalized them, and made them equal.

After World War II, the museums in Europe changed their attitudes from places for collecting pieces and passively awaiting people to new attitudes about being places for transmitting information. The new attitude had a strong purpose of creating their own influential generation. The initiative was taken by Centre National d'Art et de Culture Georges Pompidou of Paris built in 1970 and the National Gallery in London. As the number of museums increased in the city centers, people gathered in the centers. However, in Tokyo, most of the important facilities demurely locate on urban outskirts such as by the sides of expressways. Locations such as these will not be able to impress people or make them feel that they have visited museums. Consequently, Tokyo will lose its influential power as a city.

#### Beginning of modern art

After the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution, art changed. Scientism after the Industrial Revolution had supported Impressionism, the initial state of modern art. By analyzing colors with photology, the range of coloring was greatly extended. The next generation after Impressionism was Cubism, which was the work of Picasso and other artists at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century. Cubism had an unparalleled influence on modern art. In Cubism, the structure of pictures was perceived from not only the front, but also analytically from various angles. As photographs

had appeared, life drawings lost their substantial market; art changed to represent intentions and thoughts of each individual creator. This perspective greatly helped to develop individualism and modern technologies that caused the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution. People gathered in Paris for new arts from the world, interacting with each other to develop their abilities. For example, Picasso had come from Catalonia in Spain, and became famous in Paris.

Piet Mondrian, a representative of Neo Plasticism, presented the *Composition with red, yellow, and blue* in 1921, which promoted art toward abstraction and symbolization. His geometric shapes such as circles and triangles could be interpreted as world common symbols. One example of symbols is Mt. Fuji. Mt. Fuji became famous with its scale and beauty in the Edo era, attracting attention when people traveled from Kyoto to Edo on the Tokaido road, one of the main roads at the time. However people in France would not buy pictures of Mt. Fuji by Taikan Yokoyama since they did not find the same value in the symbol of Mt. Fuji as Japanese people did. Art in the bubble era was valued by further symbolization. Each symbolic item in a work of art, additions such as Mt. Fuji, pine trees, and sunrise, the value of the art became greater, and the price of pictures increased by ¥10,000,000. Pictures were valued not by their qualities, but through symbolization. When Yasushi Sugiyama, one of the artists at the time, drew carp, I had business talks like this: “How many carp are drawn in the picture?” “Two.” “Then I will buy the picture for ¥20,000,000.” Abstraction and symbolization promoted capitalization.

#### Change in modern art

Marcel Duchamp from France was a significant figure; he had great impact on postwar art. His influence almost outstripped that of Picasso. He put a ready made product, just a toilet, in a museum titling it “spring,” which made him famous. Through the work, he raised a linguistic question; the question was whether anything could be a work of art by putting it within the frame of art. Also Jean Dubuffet, a French Artist, released a picture made with mixture of sand and mud, putting more focus on materials than appearance or nature. This concept resembles Existentialism by Jean-Paul Sartre that all the human beings are strongly restricted in physical aspects, and was probably influenced from the experience of World War II that even sophisticated matters could be disrupted in an instant in war.

Since the 1970s, America started to gain power rapidly. The first person to have become famous was Jackson Pollock from New York. He presented a method called dripping; dripping is a painting method that expresses the painting activity itself, using natural and usually available materials and painting on the canvas spread out on the floor by dripping colors. Now the art represents America, and could be worth several hundred million dollars for large works. Many artists, who had come to America to escape from the Nazis during World War II, contributed to the development of American modern art through developing their talents. Robert Rauschenberg won the highest award at la Biennale di Venezia in 1970. At that time, at the bottom of American art and culture, there still remained influences of European cultures or an inferiority complex, which America was trying to get rid of. The award was the result of all the efforts of commercialization by America. By making the pricing of items created in cities as high as possible, 20<sup>th</sup> century art took

the initiative. The museums were led by American strategies; museums put the highest value on American modern art.

In Japan, modern art was first introduced by Yoshishige Saito, who began abstract drawings in prewar times. He was impressed by a Russian art exhibition hosted by the Shirakaba School, a leading group of Japanese literature at the time. Yoshishige's work greatly influenced art in Japan. Jiro Yoshihara who had belonged to Kyusitsukai founded in pre-war times, established the Gutai Art Association in the late 50s. Born in a rich merchant family in Osaka and supported by his family, he was able to know world trends of art and was affected greatly from Informel, France, which made Mr. Yoshihara the first Japanese person to enter the world of modern art. In museums worldwide, his work is now known as one of the best of Japanese art.

The difference between drawing and painting is often used as an example when comparing Japanese and Western art. Western artists bring paint exactly to the lines to create totally artificial separations; Japanese artists try to let the nature of the materials be from a certain point. When Yasuji Itakura presented his work putting emphasis on rather blurred or bled inks at Ahen, Germany, where his work was a surprise, it was received with great interest.

## 21<sup>st</sup> century Japan

Tokyo has put aside production activity and education from its center aiming for commercialization and, as a result, Tokyo was hollowed out. People can develop their thoughts widely only by interacting with other people and sharing various senses of value. How could anyone cultivate a worldview from the middle of a crop in the fields? That's why Japan's ability to produce talented artists has decreased. As a result, Tokyo's Ginza has been also spoiled; the cities have lost productive power as they have been engaged in handling only customers who spend money. Universities and factories seem to have been transformed into places with an overly rationalistic position. After the Industrial Revolution, cities created characteristic artists for the world. Such talented persons will attract other talented artists; the gathering of talent would drive a new generation of art. Art has developed in this way, but Tokyo seems to be rapidly losing its capacity to participate in this process.

Now we are trying to establish an extension school in Ginza, together with some art schools, carrying out the concept that the city promotes the school. First, we had a competition for window dressing of top brands such as Shiseido and Mikimoto. We held open review for 150 works among about 450 applicants. As only motivated people attend, the competition contributes to screen and select people to make up some hierarchy. The winning student of the Shiseido award has grown greatly through working with professional design teams and craftpersons. People stimulated each other in a valuable frame where young people and skilled people could interact. Also, professionals came and saw the student-made models. According to the professionals, students' ideas are good in spite of their primitiveness. We as a host were thinking that the competition would be a success if professionals would come and see student work.

I would also like to create brands originated in Ginza, international brands as Wako, Mikimoto and Shiseido. If the city borrows the old empty floors above the third floor of the buildings in which

brand stores are located, it could sublet places to international artists and craftpersons at half the price. We should promote Ginza as a place where interesting people engage in interesting matters, then talented people will gather around, which may attract the public and culture back to Ginza. In hope of this phenomenon, we are now planning various projects.

We should focus on handmade as a perspective in Asia. In this era everything is mass produced by machine, so only with handmade products could Asia create added value to compete. Considering producing handmade goods, we must think about whether we could make something with the manual procedures of the Edo era. I am now in charge of producing fabric in Laos, where all processes are done by hand, from spinning of thread to dyeing with plants. In Japan, only a limited number of all the people called living national treasures actually do all the processes themselves by hand. Consequently, the Japanese traditional manufacturing *monozukuri* could be done only by working with Asia. Cooperating with Asia would be also indispensable for making Ginza brands. On the other hand, it could be impossible to equip factories and machines to produce fabrics in Laos, where there is not even electricity. Their skills would not match up to the skills of Japan or China even if factories were equipped with sufficient facilities. It is better to put an emphasis on handmade goods. I would very much like to promote new products with Asian people.