

Voices from Artist to the World

No.10

Masatake Kouzaki

Masatake Kouzaki makes unique works suggestive of contemporary religious painting, called "Tohokuga" by the artist. Recently, his exhibition in overseas has been well regarded.



Winning USB Art Award 2000 Finalist Japan and the grand prize at the 13th Memorial of Aoki Nishinippon Art Exhibition in 2004, Masatake Kouzaki has been expanding his exhibition activity at home and abroad. The artist, profoundly influenced by Netherlandish painter Hieronymus Bosch (c.1450-1516), makes works with a subject of TOUGEN -- a transcendental world or a world beyond the other shore -- to give a message to overseas crossing a national boundary and culture.

--We hear that last March, you had the first solo exhibition in New York. How was a reaction there?

K (hereafter referred to as K): I think it was fine. I've long had exchanges with art scene in New York through participating in art fairs or group shows every year at Dillon Gallery, Chelsea. So, in spite of the first experience of solo exhibition there, my work had already been familiar to the viewers.

--How your work was regarded?

K: My work depicts a variety of strange animals and plants in an atmosphere of gold-leaf-covered folding screen, which seems to remind viewers of European medieval motifs of religious painting as seen in Hieronymus Bosch's. Also, my work uses Greek myth-like motifs or Oriental ones in semi-Western style,

and I've often been told that the mixture is interesting.

--Including strange creatures, your work has incorporated new elements, such as satellite, and is like a religious painting of contemporary taste.

K: The motifs are all something to which man entrusts its prayer or dream, and the mixture of them, including satellite, sometimes looks like a plant or a creature. A plant, combined with something else, looks like man and vice versa...

--I wonder if such an individual development of images has resulted from deep influence of Hieronymus Bosch.

K: That's right. it seems to me that Bosch's work is almost like contemporary art with a perfect world-view on painting. My work might be, in a sense, homage to his work, or a renewal of



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I believe that artists are a creator of a new image of Japan.

it through adopting new materials or manners of my own-- for example, through the use of computer. I could say that I've intended to give a slight change with modern arrangement to Bosch's work.

--When did you meet Bosch's work for the first time?

K: Though in a picture book, probably as a 2nd-year student at art university. I remember that his work had a great impact on me. It's true that Rakuchu rakugai zu (Japanese folding screens of the grand view of the capital) is also an overwhelmingly panoramic painting, but Bosch's work features a more chaotic image with human figures arranged, in which man looks like plant, animals look like man, or a tower looks like a spaceship; there, both the past and future seems to be perfectly

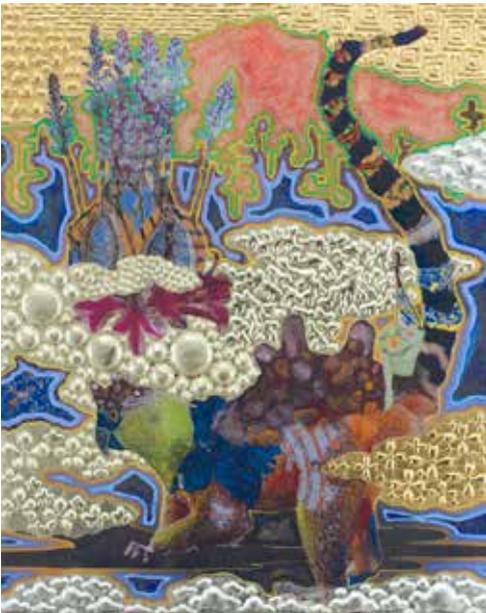
completed. Before experiencing Bosch's work, I had had a fixed idea that a work of new art must be something great concerning pictorial space or color, but I've now realized that it also can be achieved by painting something different. I believe that I'll be able to achieve it by following Bosch's methodology and keeping



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painting in my own way. Since I realized that, I seem to have been consistent with working in my present style, though, till then, I had been making a lot of installations and abstract paintings. I feel, as it were, fated to encounter Bosch.

--You make full use of various materials for those two-dimensional works employing the unique methodology. Is the use of computer essential to that?

K: Firstly, I use computer to make a stock of exact outline of shapes as many as possible, and try various expressions; I combine each of those shapes, as if to make patchworks, and recompose them as a rough design, to which I lay gold leaves, mineral pigments, etc., to render a sense of material of oil painting. The use of computer alone could tend to create excessively perfect images, so I place on the surface things with strong materiality, such as gold leaves and mineral pigments, to produce impact there.

--In doing so, do you use any painting material, regardless of materials for nihonga (Japanese-style painting) or for yoga (Western-style painting)?

K: Yes. I don't care about such a fixed methodology as that gold leaf or mineral pigment, for example, should be used this or that way, but if someone says such a manner is wrong, that can't be helped. After all, I use various materials -- even lame or acrylic as if it were ground for Tsugarunuri coating craft.

--You mean you use every conceivable kind of materials to create a world of your own.

K: That's right. I'd like to use not only extremely

modern materials, but Japanese traditional ones like haku (leaf).

--Is that also because you take durability of work into consideration?

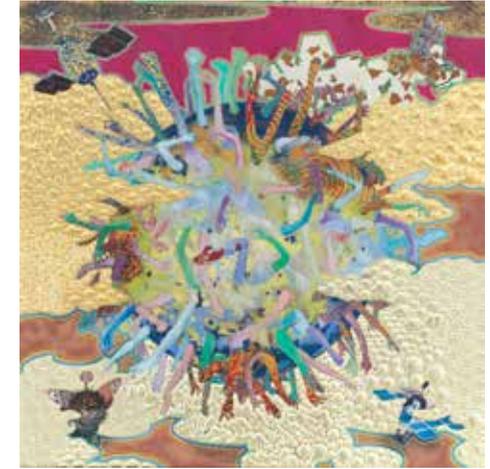
K: I think that's the point I must take care about. There are various problems that I must solve, for I've had bitter experiences in overseas exhibitions. For example, my work using nikawa (glue) for nihonga suffered considerable damage. That's why I used acrylic only for every piece for the last New York show.

--Is your idea of "tohokuga" related to the methodology that you use any material regardless for nihonga or yoga painting?

K: The definition of yoga itself was only given at around the Meiji Restoration (1968). I thought I'd like to establish experimental definition of "tohokuga," though not yet fixed in my mind, once I get rid of the fence between nihonga and yoga; I don't draw a line between the two and the idea of "tohokuga" is, as it were, only a device for me to doubt the categories. At first I didn't have such idea in my mind, but, as I was wondering what "tohokuga" is, I seemed to have felt that my work possibly could represent "tohokuga."

--I hear that you have been doing research for that.

K: That I currently work for Tohoku University of Art and Design in Yamagata as associate professor might be related to that I'm from Fukushima. I'd travel around Tohoku areas of holy lands, Osorezan mountain in Aomori, and mountain temples in Yamagata, etc. Then I began to think about what Tohoku is,



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and thought I wanted to represent Tohoku's image or something as painting. For that aim, I've been active with a university colleague Natsunosuke Mise, who teaches nihonga, and have been doing research with students on Tohoku's culture that could easily be considered as something eerie. I'm aggressively trying to use motifs representing Tohoku including a kokeshi doll, which might also be a try to reorganize my roots or reality as a painting. I didn't do that until I lived in Yamagata.

--I suppose that the activity and your long-time artistic theme "TOUGEN" are not very far apart.

K: "TOUGEN" has an origin in Tougenkyo (a paradise on earth) in China. The meaning is neither Utopia nor Shangri-La as understood in the Western world, but an image like a transcendental world or a world beyond the other shore. I hear that Tougenkyo in China seems to mean not only realization of an ideal world, but also abandonment of the realization or a fantastic world you cannot see if not

achieving spiritual enlightenment. I suppose that the world is based on a sense characteristic of the Oriental people and the holy land can even be an amusement park. My painting depicts, in a sense, such an amusement park with merry-go-rounds, but it's hard to call the world a mandala. I could say that my painting is, at least, a world of self-completion.

-I suppose that, through the powerful expression with the themes of "Tohokuga" and "TOUGEN," you wish to develop artistic career even more in overseas.

K: I, of course, would like to extend activities also in overseas, and in doing so, I think it important how my work will finally be dealt with by art galleries there. I'm glad if overseas viewers will find something interesting in my work. I wish I could spread a new image of Japan, only a country in Asia. I believe that, as shown in the case of artist Yayoi Kusama, artists are a creator of a new image of Japan. Making the most of national individuality and universal power of art, we will be able to give to overseas art scene a real sense or sensation of present life originally cultivated

in Japan, though I'm not very confident to hold the balance between the national and the international.

-We hope that your artistic career will develop even more.

Profile: Masatake Kouzaki

1972 born in Fukushima
 1994 entered the department of oil painting, Tama Art University
 1995 entered the department of oil painting, Tokyo National University of Fine Arts
 1999 B.F.A., oil painting, Tokyo National University of Fine Arts, awarded Ohashi prize and university-purchase prize
 2000 USB Art Award 2000, London. awarded Moritani prize from Moritani Ikuikai Foundation
 2001 a Exhibition at Nihombashi Mitsukoshi Department Store
 2004 awarded grand prize at Memorial of the 13th Aoki Nishinippon Art Exhibition
 2005 Ph. D., Tokyo National University of Fine Arts. "New Spirits Fukushima -- About Stories: Masatake Kouzaki, Katsuyuki Takahashi, and Hiroshi Kobayashi Exhibition"
 2011 Exhibition of "TOUGEN No.48," Cafe Stage at Tsutaya Book Store.
 currently a professor at Tohoku University of Art and Design

TOUGEN Shangri-La: "Masatake Kouzaki Exhibition"
 Karuizawa New Art Museum
 Apr.11-May 13



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"I LOVE MYSELF TOO MUCH!! YAYOI KUSAMA -- Narcissism that Moved the World" started, curated from a new perspective by guest curator Junji Ito.

The special preview and opening ceremony were held on April 10 before public viewing on the following day, crowded with Junji Ito and local mass-media such as Shinano Mainichi Shimbun, Jomo Shimbun, NBS Nagano TV and other people concerned. The exhibition is divided into four sections: early period before Kusama came to Tokyo; New York period; obscure period after coming home and before drawing attention at Venetia Biennale; and the limelight period as an international artist. Exhibited are Kusama's works that can casually be viewed at art museums and those rarely showcased. Different works will be shown in each exhibition period.



"I LOVE MYSELF TOO MUCH!! YAYOI KUSAMA -- Narcissism that Moved the World"
 former part: April 11 - June 30
 latter part: July 5 - Sep. 23

Hiroyoshi Asaka's Three-dimensional work "Nihontou" in granite

"My native city Sakai, Osaka, has a long history of cutting tool. As I've been familiar with the tool since my childhood, I've never felt incongruous in it," said Hiroyoshi Asaka at the gallery space, Karuizawa New Art Museum, where his solo exhibition of sculptures was being held. Asaka, who had been making abstract stone sculptures, is an artist who makes figurative works such as nihontou (Japanese sword) and even shuriken (throwing star). He added, "Wishing to represent Japanese noble and pure mind, I've grown to make such sculptures." Asaka quarries out, polish stones, and devotes himself to producing sculpture as if to train warrior's mind. The delicate and polished expression of nihontou in black granite introduced viewers to his unique three-dimensional art.



April 11 - May 6
 Katana in Stone KABUKIMON: Hiroyoshi Asaka Exhibition
 at the gallery space at 1F, Karuizawa New Art Museum