



The Sky, Mount Fuji, and the Seven Deities of Good Fortune on a Flying Dragon 2015 Mixed media work

Melody of the Firmament

Journal of Koji Kinutani Tenku Art Museum

2020.10
vol.3

Now is the time for the power of art

Mamoru Nanjo, Advisor / Curator of Koji Kinutani Tenku Art Museum

Natural disasters, epidemics, wars... How can humankind realize the "radiance of life" while overcoming numerous occasions of hardship? I truly feel that human history has been represented by the accumulation of such ordeals. Perhaps that was where mankind sought for miracles through art, and in doing so came to believe in its power.

As is well known, many of the masterpieces standing out in the history of art have been embellished with stories of their coming into being following adversity. Unprecedented art trends have tended to arise in the aftermath of major social upheaval. In 20th century art, for example, Dadaism, and Surrealism arose in the period between the two World Wars and Art Informel afterward. In addition, the Abstract Expressionism movement developed simultaneously in the critical condition of modern society which emerged after the Great Depression. Undisguised feelings buried deep in the human psyche surfaced when faced with adversity, which paved the way for the sharp sensitivity of artists to devise new values and aesthetic senses.

Art was once the visualization of doctrine as a mark for prayer and salvation, and it played a part in demonstrating the power of royalty, nobility and the ruling class. After the modern era, art developed into a formative creation that sincerely asked how people should exist while beset by conditions of anger, sorrow, desperation, anxiety or insanity. It did this

by reflecting a problem consciousness fueled by the introspection and self-searching of artists themselves on ideas and principles. It was also the expression of an important message as a wake-up call for human beings who possess an inherent "cry of life" which is not merely a beautiful and comfortable expression at all.

It is said that the times give birth to art. If that is true, then is it not so that now is the very time when the true value of modern art is being questioned to see what art trend will come out in the future as we face a once-in-a-century unprecedented crisis?

The Descent of the Muses- Renaissance is in session at Koji Kinutani Tenku Art Museum, which is a special exhibit remarkably fitting for this period in history. In particular, "An Angel in New York" and "The Morning Sun, Mt. Fuji and Two Dragons Each Gripping a Ball - Dharma-Gate of Non-Duality", are gigantic three-dimensional objects of painted Styrofoam that should not be missed.

"An Angel in New York" was made for his solo exhibition in New York in 1998 to express a wish of entrusting prayer for world peace to the angel in view of an uneasy global situation. It has a wooden body resembling a bird cage, flowing tears, and a face appealing for peace. A missile in the image of a nuclear warhead is held in its wings that are about to carry it into the wide

sky. As soon as we take notice of it, the body reminds us of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial. This work gives off a tense atmosphere as if predicting the synchronized terrorist attacks that later shocked the world. It is earnestly calling our attention to the acts of folly repeatedly committed by mankind. More than anything, please pay attention to the large flower placed on

the back. This is the symbol of trust for humans and rebirth beyond tragedy. It has a grand message proclaiming love of humanity.

Without doubt, the resurrection of “dream and hope” is there.

“The Morning Sun, Mt. Fuji and Two Dragons Each Gripping a Ball – Dharma-Gate of Non-Duality”, made in 2019, is an imposing masterpiece measuring over 2m high and 3m wide. Mt. Fuji (can

also mean “Non-Duality”) arises tall from a sea of clouds in the background of the resplendently shining morning sun. Red and Blue dragons are in flight, each gripping a sacred ball as if entwining themselves around Mt. Fuji. Children are mounted on the back of each dragon, crying out with joy as if symbolizing the fertility of nature and eternal vitality. Courage is depicted here, seeming about to burst forth with a powerful yell to drive away the pandemic.

The Dharma-Gate of Non-Duality is at the core of the Vimalakirti Sutra, explaining that conflicting concepts such as good and bad, beautiful and ugly, life and death, or war and peace are originally parts of one entity. It urges us to accept their mutual

existence, to have the wisdom to live by learning through accepting everything, and enlightenment toward light. Minus exists because plus exists, and vice versa. Life will encounter death end even if we are obliged by nature to look in only one direction at a time, it tells us the importance of the philosophy of seeing with both eyes.

It resonates with the artistic view of Koji Kinutani, that is to say, art should not dwell on being well or poorly skilled, on weaknesses or strengths but to aim for the fertility of nature which surrounds all individual spectacular achievements. We can say that the Buddhist thought of Koji Kinutani is vividly breathing, nurtured in the ancient city of Nara where the Great Buddha is to be found.

By the way, please pay attention to the display space of the above-mentioned two pieces. “An Angel in New York” is placed as if surrounded by “Arabesque”, a series of 20 masterpieces in affresco (fresco), the classic technique of mural painting which is



The large flower carved on the back of “An Angel in New York” symbolizing “Trust and rebirth of humans”



Display of “An Angel in New York” and “Arabesque”



The Morning Sun, Mt. Fuji and Two Dragons, Each Gripping a Ball-Dharma-Gate of Non-Duality 2019 Styrofoam Mixed media work

pretty much representative of Koji. “Arabesque” is a mural painting which at one time decorated the theater entrance of the “National Children's Castle” in Aoyama, Tokyo. It is a dream story filled with the joy of peace beyond time and space, which is dedicated to children all over the world. Because of that, by arranging the piece of “An Angel in New York” which calls attention to the futility of war, the space becomes the embodiment of the “Dharma-Gate of Non-Duality” where the conflicting entities of war and peace co-exist.

Meanwhile, “The Morning Sun, Mt. Fuji and Two Dragons Each Gripping a Ball – Dharma-Gate of Non-Duality” is displayed in the Tenku Gallery boasting a spectacular view, overlooking Osaka Bay. It turns on the stage with a golden background. A visitor comparing the world of the image of this grandiose work and the daily lives of people below, can catch a glimpse of greatness of art, mystery of life and depth of the human spirit again in the space of “Non-Duality” woven by nature and art, imagination and reality.

Koji Kinutani has always said, “Paradise lies in this world,” and asks us about the importance of enjoying life. He sends this passionate message with praise for the radiance of life using his paintbrush. By experiencing Kinutani Art as we live through these difficult times, is it not so that we are able to look at the unlimited potential of humankind and believe in “resurrection” beyond our daily life, plagued as it is with COVID-19 and natural disasters?

Mr. Brian May, the famous guitarist of the world-renowned rock band “Queen” visited the museum in January this year. He was impressed with the power of Kinutani art, and gave rave reviews, saying “This opened a new door to me.” This is exactly the very ideal of Koji Kinutani Tenku Art Museum. It is a sincere wish to support a new departure of people through art, and it also wishes to be a place of bliss to pray for rebirth.

Give energy for humankind! Now is the time for the power of art.



Mr. Brian May visited the museum in January 2020

Description of a work : The Seven Gods of Good Fortune Riding the Surf

Akio Takahashi, Assistant curator / Educator of Koji Kinutani Tenku Art Museum

I am currently in charge of the “Affresco painting workshop,” which takes place monthly. It is literally for participants to experience affresco, a classic mural painting technique that is rarely available to try. Every time before the painting experience, I give an approx. one-hour lecture on the displayed pieces. I walk through the museum with the participants and give the lecture to explain the Kinutani works and the structure and technique of affresco. In the program, participants fully appreciate the energetic and colorful Kinutani World, and try to create an affresco piece on the basis of inspiration gained in it. We do not set a participants’ target, but every time we have a high proportion of parents with elementary school students.

When I give an explanation to a group with a lot of children, I ask for their comments and opinions in addition to my talk, and observe the pieces while



Celebration-Flying Dragon Dharma-Gate of Non-Duality 2013 Mixed media work

making conversation. This is partly because children get bored with one-sided explanations, but above all I often find the children’s comments very creative and interesting. In addition, sharing them among the participants leads to deepening the series of work appreciation, and some adult viewers including myself (if not all) become aware of how we become immersed in stereotype when we view the works. Let me introduce some of the findings I experienced the other day. When I was explaining “Celebration – Flying Dragon Dharma-Gate of Non-Duality”, I asked the children questions like “What things are painted?” “Which colors are used?” One of them looked at the balls held in the claws of the dragon and told me “The moon and the sun are painted.” It is possible Koji Kinutani painted these balls on the assumption they represented the moon and the sun. I am very ashamed to admit that I had never before thought of these balls as “the moon and the sun”. I remember I reflected on my imagination bound by the stereotype, and I learned that the “Dharma-Gate of Non-Duality” also appeared here.

By the way, let me finish this long introductory remark. I would like to talk about “The Seven Gods of Good Fortune Riding the Surf”, which is particularly popular

with children, when I give a talk about the pieces at the workshop in this issue.

In “The Seven Gods of Good Fortune Riding the Surf”, the seven well-known gods are painted as if they are having fun on jet skis. At the front from the left, we see Daikokuten, the god of commerce, agriculture, and prosperity, Benzaiten, the goddess of financial fortune, music and art, Jurojin, the god of longevity, and Bishamonten, the god of warriors and a punisher of evildoers. Hotei, the god of happiness, contentment and good fortune, and Ebisu the god of successful business, are riding together behind. Fukurokuju, the god of wisdom, luck and longevity is painted at the top. These gods have various backgrounds rooted in Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Shinto. Their nationalities also vary, Indian, Chinese and Japanese, etc. In modern terminology, we can express it as “diversity”, symbolizing the adaptability of the Japanese whose country is located on the eastern end of the Silk Road and have accepted foreign cultures and gods since ancient times. In any case, this piece shows Kinutani World at its best, ever cheerful and full of humor. Don’t you feel the genial personality of Koji Kinutani from this piece along with the broad-mindedness of the motif?

Children are amused at the Seven Gods of Good Fortune with their expressive faces in this unusual pose, and adults chuckle at the situation depicted differently from what we are familiar with. I think this piece holds charm for every visitor.

I would like to take up “The Seven Gods of Good Fortune Riding the Surf” in this issue not only because it is a piece appealing to viewers with its humorous style but also because it is a piece filled with the challenging spirit of Koji Kinutani as a painter and his ardent wishes.

I became aware of this fact when I accompanied Kinutani on one of his visiting workshops of the “Children’s Dream, Art, Academy” held in numerous places for which he always manages to make time no matter how busy he may be. This “Children’s Dream, Art, Academy” is cosponsored by The Japan Art Academy and the Agency for Cultural Affairs. It is a social contribution project where members of the Japan Art Academy, who are the top-level artists in art, literature, music, play and dance, visit elementary, junior and senior high schools all over Japan. They give lectures, demonstrations, and hands-on instruction to convey the greatness of cultural and artistic activities as well as the importance of living with a dream so that children can nurture and pass on the rich spirit and sensitivities.



The Seven Gods of Good Fortune Riding the Surf 2011 Mixed media work

In these workshops, Kinutani tells the children “You don't have to draw pictures well. What is important is whether you can express what you want to draw”. This is what he teaches children: In the world of art, there is no need to be the same as others. There is no single right answer. The answer to “1 plus 1” can be 3 or 4, and this is the epitome of artistic expression. Therefore, it is important to express themselves in their own way using the colors of their choice in the world of unlimited images. The teaching of Kinutani in respect of diverse individuality is a novel experience for children. I think it opens the door to fully encounter the fun and joy of drawing and creating images.

For children, to truly create drawings and paintings of their very own means to believe in their potential of expression and nurture the ability to draw their dreams and to develop the images. Kinutani carefully teaches and guides children through this visiting workshop to let them know that they first have to acquire the love of drawing.

Moreover, I think “The Seven Gods of Good Fortune Riding the Surf” is a most exemplary piece, filled with messages from Kinutani to children. This piece is nothing but an original image of Kinutani, and I have never seen anything similar. Kinutani depicted the Seven Gods in the way he wanted to make them appear. Such straightforward self-expression draws both agreements and disagreements, especially for Kinutani considering his position. That said, Kinutani finished this painting, and I think this piece is loaded with the ardent message of Kinutani which he had to send, and it is the very message he keeps sending to children in “Children's Dream, Art, Academy”. I wonder if he showed this piece as a leading example.

Furthermore, Kinutani said in his interview on writing characters in the pictures, “At first, I was criticized that it looked like manga or funny words from the mouth and does not look like an authentic picture. However, after I was recognized, I think it became one of the chances for younger generations to be frank and paint as they want. If that is the case, I am happy.” (“Bursting Energy of Colors – All of Koji Kinutani” Sun Art, ‘Gekkan Bijutsu’ August 2017 edition). I think these words are the true intention of making “The Seven Gods of Good Fortune Riding the Surf” together with aforementioned practical advice. No characters are written in this piece but it encourages creators to be truly free, and even some informal expressions that are taboo, in a way, can be sincerely painted without hesitation. Behind this piece, when it is recognized in the world, I can say there lies his intention of widening the range of expressions of future painters and children, can't I?

Kinutani places importance on succession and keeping the connection with the future in his production. A lot of the pieces at our museum have such messages. Through his works, he is always sending his messages to us who are living now and future generations to come, trying to communicate. Affresco has high durability. Kinutani himself who has chosen this painting method that can survive hundreds and thousands of years may naturally be aware of that. I feel we can see his strong sense of mission as a painter, and deep down further, we can see the nature of Koji Kinutani as a private person who is sincerely facing up to what he can do for society through art.

So I want to facilitate conversation between the pieces and the viewers as much as possible instead of a one-way explanation in talk about the pieces at the workshop, which I mentioned at the beginning. I believe conversation with the pieces would energize the free imagination of children and lead to wider values using both eyes. Above all, I truly wish from the bottom of my heart that being exposed to Kinutani art, which wraps up the diversity of children from a broader perspective, will offer an opportunity for the love of art to develop.



Scene of workshop when Kinutani himself gave a lecture at the opening of the museum

Announcement from the Museum

Measures to prevent COVID-19 from spreading

Koji Kinutani Tenku Art Museum was temporarily closed from March 5 (Thu) to June 2 (Tue), 2020 in response to the Declaration of a State of Emergency by the national government and request for voluntary business suspension by Osaka Prefecture to prevent COVID-19 from spreading. After resuming our business, we will continue our preventive measures against infections so that people can visit us without worry. Please refer to the URL below for details as well as requests for our visitors.

<https://www.kinutani-tenku.jp/topics/detail.php?pkId=63>

We appreciate your understanding and cooperation.

Published on November 2, 2020 Melody of the Firmament vol.3

Edit/publish Koji Kinutani Tenku Art Museum

27th Floor, Umeda Sky Building Tower West, 1-1-30, Oyodonaka, Kita-ku, Osaka