

日本的当代巴洛克

Philippe Codognet

日本是一个岛，这个我们都知道……而日本的当代艺术在很大程度上都保持着一种岛国的姿态，很少越过本国的边界。日本艺术家只有为数不多的几个人赢得了国际声誉，进入了全球艺术市场，像老一辈的草间弥生的“点能量”，之后一代的村上隆的“超扁平”和奈良美智的“忧悒的小女孩”。也许只有在摄影领域，才以其“日本之眼”的丰富性得以被世界认同，所涉及的艺术家的名字包括荒木经惟、杉本博司、畠山直哉和森山大道等人。其中一个原因是在日本，应用艺术——像建筑、设计甚至摄影的传统比当代艺术来得更加根深蒂固和强势。事实上，由黑格尔在19世纪建立、又在20世纪初期由前卫运动和观念艺术付诸实践的把艺术作为哲学的延续这一见识，在今天还难以被日本完全理解——虽然这一理念在亚洲其他国家像中国、韩国和泰国已经风行了几十年。因此大多数的日本艺术家还基本留连在用一些古典的或后现代的技巧描绘他们的所见所感，而不会去关心一些有关社会、政治或形而上的问题……真正的观念艺术，甚至法国策展人/哲学家尼古拉·布希沃所提出的用以解释20世纪后期艺术思潮的“关系美学”，也与日本的艺术格格不入。所以大多数的日本艺术家都愿意停留在装饰性上，这一点我们可以在几个近期的日本当代艺术的展览上得以窥见一斑，像东京森美术馆的“横越六本木”，日本文化交流基金会的巡展“美丽新世界”等。事实上，在今天各种各样的全球问题让世界变得一天比一天可怕和动荡时，除了那些住在岛上与世隔绝的人，谁还会认为新世界是美丽的？

但是，在上面所描述的这个相当保守的艺术世界里，还有几位艺术家试图逃离这种普遍的状况，去探索未知的领域。本文将介绍两位这样的年轻艺术家，他们可以把日本的传统和西方的影响以新奇的方式融合起来，去探索深刻而隐晦的问题，他们分别是松井冬子和龟井亨。他们的绘画繁复而有趣，与东西方的艺术史都有关联，可作多种解

说，以当代的情感呼应着巴洛克时代以来那些被遗忘的记忆。

巴洛克是一个继文艺复兴那些辉煌的杰作之后一个有趣的日暮期，相比较而言也更加丰富和复杂。之后是更黑暗的时期，战争和宗教冲突在有些地区时有发生，还有天灾（如瘟疫）。诡辩和颓废交织，善与恶、光与影、生与死通过复杂的寓言和深奥的形式结构，成了艺术图像的日常主角，曲线和蛇形线条

代替了文艺复兴盛期的方正得如棋盘般的构图。

有几位艺术理论家，如法国哲学家克里斯汀·布切—格鲁克斯曼的，已经指出了巴洛克时期与20世纪晚期欧洲当代艺术的关系。也许这种关系也能在21世纪初期的几位日本艺术家身上发现。事实上其他几位艺术家，像佃弘树和三岛秋吉，也受西方巴洛克图像的影响，虽然他们的技术相当专注于拼贴和画面的重构。



松井冬子
《为四肢雕刻的祭坛》
丝上彩绘

Fuyuko Matsui
Engraved Altar of Limbs
Color on Silk

2007



克莱门特·苏西尼
《医学上的维纳斯》
蜡像
(现陈列于意大利佛罗伦萨天文博物馆)

Clemente Susini
Medical Venus
Anatomical Wax
(Museo La Specola,
Florence, Italy)

18th Century

松井冬子

松井冬子1974年出生于日本东南部的静冈。在过去几年里她成为日本最具潜力的艺术家，她使用日本画[nihonga]这种日本传统的绘画技法，引起了媒体的关注。2006年，所谓的“新日本画”作为一种日本当代艺术的新的运动出现，这一运动伴着两个主要的展览，一个是2006年4月在东京都当代美术馆举行的“从日本画到日本画”，另一个是2006年8月在横滨美术馆举行的“日本画：六个挑衅的艺术家”。这两个展览里都有松井冬子的作品。但是她的风格跟别的艺术家都非常不同，其他艺术家是把传统日本文化的基本元素作为作品的主题，用新技术重新诠释，有时加点讽刺的意味。松井正好与此相反：对她而言，日本画只是一种技术，一种和油画相比她更偏爱的技术，但是绘画的题材则挖掘于她的内心，作品也就变得复杂和怪异。另外，她给作品所起的名字也让人困惑和惊奇，因为在画和名字之间并没有明显的联系。她的作品有时被新闻媒体描述为“怪异”或“超现实”，但是松井一笑置之，她甚至喜欢别人用“怪异”这个词作形容。她愿意让人觉得不自在，她想触及基本的生理的官能。她的一些作品像《夜盲症》描述了诡异的形象，令人心发毛，好像她真的在纸上捉到了一个鬼……这要追溯到日本19世纪以河锅晓斋等大师为代表的“鬼画”传统。松井深谙“鬼画”之道，因为她2007年在东京国立艺术和音乐学院所通过的博士论文的主题就是“鬼画”，她也成为了第一个从这所富有盛名的学院得到传统日本画博士学位的女性——第一位男性是十年前的村上隆。但是，松井并没有受传统技法的限制，在描绘面部的时候并没有像传统的“鬼画”那样只使用线。她出生的静冈有很强烈的光影对比，但她冬天去京都

松井冬子
《完美幸福的万能圣药》
丝上彩绘

Fuyuko Matsui
Eternal Almighty
Medicine for
Perfect Happiness
Color on Silk

2005

和奈良去玩的时候，对雾气着了迷，就想在她自己的鬼画里重现这种视觉模糊的感觉。

但是松井也从西方艺术史里取材，她选择所有能触动她感性的东西。她著名的作品《保持纯洁》涉及到巴洛克时期的解剖蜡像，作品先后参加了由让·克莱尔策划的“身体的精神”展（巴黎，1993），和由马丁·坎普策划的“奇异的身体”（伦敦，1999）展，重新获得关注。更准确地说，《保持纯洁》描绘的是18世纪的蜡塑术的大师克莱

门特·苏西尼的“医学上的维纳斯”，这个蜡像目前陈列在佛罗伦萨的天文博物馆里。但是，在松井的画里，这个腹部剖开，露出内脏的“维纳斯”四周的环境却非常和平，盛开了娇嫩的花朵……怎么解释和看待这个作品呢？或者我们该注意到它回应了当代艺术的另一件杰作：马塞尔·杜尚的《给予》[Etant donne’]: 1) la chute d’eau 2) le gaz d’eclairage (1968)。杜尚的装置展示了一幅奇异的乡村景色，里面可以看到一个裸体的（并且受伤的？）女人，观众被明显地置于“偷窥者”的处境之中。





松井冬子
《对切断的长期实验学习》
纸上铅笔

Fuyuko Matsui
**Study for The Cut Long-term
Experiment**
Pencil on paper

2004

正如杜尚所言：“ce sont les regardeurs qui font l'oeuvre”（“是观众创造了艺术作品”），我们可以想见，杜尚的作品，在这个实体装置之外，是在于能在观者的心里制造一种不安。松井的作品当然也是这样。在与解剖相关的作品后，她最近的两幅作品（还未命名）是扭曲的自画像，用透视的方式画了暴露在外的脊柱，有几块脊椎骨被植入的金属代替。他们不仅指涉了她自己的生活

和受的伤（虽然没有所画的那么具戏剧性），而且还回应着对伤害、畸形身体以及肉与金属共生的奇怪迷恋，这种迷恋在J. G. 巴拉德1970年代初期以来的作

品里看到，尤其是他的小说《暴行展示会》（1970）和《撞车》（1973），其中《撞车》在1996年被大卫·克罗恩伯格改变成了电影——松井熟悉并且喜欢这部电影。朋克绘画团体Bazooka的成员之一、法国艺术家卢鲁·毕加索1970年代后期的一些作品，也以类似的感觉用透视的方式描绘了内脏解剖的细节。

像我们在蓬托尔莫、布隆津诺或贝尼尼的作品中所见的那样。那幅有着谜样名字《完美幸福的万能圣药》的女人的正面肖像作品，其构图类似于文艺复兴盛期或矫饰主义初期的肖像画。但是，这个画上的女人一部分头盖骨没了，露出了大脑和一些辨不清楚的血管，很明显有什么不同寻常的事情存在。因此，如果说形式是古代的，因为它也许涉及的是安德西亚·维萨留斯的《被造的人体》里的一些插图，这是1543年就有的关于解剖的最早的医书，而内容却是当代的：松井描绘的不仅是逸出脑壳的脑浆，还有当代社会因为种种扰人的新

龟井亨

《蜿蜒的沼泽》
亚麻布上绘画

Toru Kamei
Serpentine Swamp
Oil on Linen
Mounted on Board

2006



龟井亨
《所有的花与昆虫》系列
亚麻布上油画

Toru Kamei
All the Flowers and Insects series
Oil on Linen Mounted on Board

2007



技术（手机和网络）的出现，而使得疏离和分裂人格在同一个自我内共存的那种心理状态。那么《完美幸福的万能圣药》中这个真的是失去头脑的女人……就是今天完美幸福的药剂吗？在其他几幅画里，人也失去了一些内脏器官，但是看起来也不怎么在意：这是对今天人们正在分崩离析却毫无察觉的隐喻吗？

松井冬子
《夜盲症》
丝上彩绘

Fuyuko Matsui
Nyctalopia
Color on Silk

2005



我们不能忘记在很多这样的作品里，其基本的理念就是借着描摹身体去触及灵魂。因此所有的作品谈论的都是当代社会；对松井来说，未来是黑暗的，人类没有乌托邦。但是松井并不害怕当代社会，她只是奇怪为什么这么多的日本艺术家要试图逃避现实和后现代世界所存在的问题。一个很有趣的事是在工作室画画时，会听电子音乐（里奇·霍汀/塑胶狂人），因为这种重复性的节奏会让她陷入迷思，完全沉浸在绘画里。极简电子乐成为了日本传统绘画的背景音乐……欢迎来到21世纪！

龟井亨

龟井亨出生于1976年，15岁高中时开始学画，学了10年的古典绘画和油画后，确定了其个人风格。油画可以被看作是一种古典的西方媒介，但是我们也不能忘记日本也有自己的油画传统。油画在1868年明治维新被引入日本后，在不到10年的时间里日本就有画师掌握了这种技术，如高桥由一在1877年写实作品《鲑鱼》中所示。但是为什么选择油画，为什么现实主义在绘画中这么重要？龟井发现人很难表达自己的感觉，认为信息最好通过视觉进行传达，所以写实很重要。掌握油画的写实再现是使他能够以比抽象更深刻的方式来表达感觉和情感的关键因素。但是，使用什么技法并没有那么重要；重点在于表达的能力，通过画所创造出来的对话的机会。对一个21世纪的艺术家的不同寻常的是，尤其是一个日本艺术家而言，龟井2004年起开始创作的《所有的花与昆虫》系列，是他自己对虚空画派这一17世纪发源于荷兰画的巴洛克风格的重新阐释。原本的虚空画派的画隐喻了世上万物皆是虚空，试图让观众意识到物质世界里死亡的无所不在和永恒的精神世界的重要性。龟井一直对欧洲中世纪宗教绘画中的死亡主题感兴趣，像15世纪死亡之舞或memento mori [记住生命有限]的壁画，这些壁画是后来虚空画的前身。在他的《所有的花与昆虫》系列中，龟井画了一个骷髅头，周围是花、

昆虫和眼睛。巴洛克的虚空画中当然有花，代表的是短暂的美丽，但是龟井却别有用意：它们代表了另一种形式的生命，被吸引到了头骨旁边，像是要提供一种象征性的庇护。在他其他的一些作品中，动物完全被花所覆盖，像要骗过观众或向他隐瞒什么，也是延续了同样的想法。眼睛在他的画里也有特别的意义：他们象征了一种比人更强的生命形式，在生命的脆弱和那些抽象生命形式的强悍之间有一种对比。他说画画的时候他有时会感觉被什么东西看着，所以想在画布上表现这种感觉。

但是，像松井一样，龟井的画也不容易被日本观众接受和理解其真正的含义。有些人甚至认为他的虚空画是“劣质的恐怖电影”。龟井知道有这种误解，他说只要有1%的观众对他的作品有共鸣，喜欢他的作品，他就很开心了。如果虚空画是隐晦的自画像，那他其他的作品就是很明显的了，有时他会用一些佛教或印度教里的一些典型的图像。但是他总是把自己画成裸体，抹掉所有与文化、时间和空间的关联。就是一个人，裸露着、无所准备但又匆匆而逝。

结论

松井和龟井的绘画复杂地混合或再混合了来自传统和现代、东与西、文化与自然的影响。在某种意义上，他们创造了一个沟通时空的桥梁，跨越了意大利的矫饰主义、荷兰的巴洛克和日本的传统，在不同的时空里同一主题反复出现。这和日本当代艺术的未来有何关联呢？

现在，很多艺术家都在做一种文化上的橱窗购物，随便捡起什么宝贝，不加任何判断。但对松井和龟井来说，局外人可能有了更多的机会。应该有一些对国籍、历史和地理都没有指涉的东西。它不会去严格地代表日本，但可能只是表现了东京这么一种现代大都市普遍的生活方式，那么也就能和世界的其他地方相联系，发出一些世界性的回响。

Japanese Contemporary Baroque

□ By Philippe Codognet

Japan is an island, everybody knows ... And Japanese contemporary art mostly keeps an insular attitude and remains within the boundaries of the country. Few Japanese artists managed to be recognized at the international level and to enter the global art market, e.g. veteran Yayoi "dot power" Kusama or newer generation Takashi "superflat" Murakami and Yoshitomi "moody little girl" Nara. Maybe only in photography has the richness of the "apanese eye" being appreciated worldwide, with artists as diverse as Araki, Sugimoto, Hatakeyama, Moriyama, and others. One reason is that, in Japan, the tradition of applied arts such as architecture, design and somehow photography is stronger and more deeply rooted than that of contemporary art. Indeed, the vision of art as the continuation of philosophy, as developed by Hegel in the 19th century and reified in Western art with the modern "avant-gardes" of the early 20th century and in conceptual art, has difficulties to be fully understood in Japan even today - although it has been flourishing since a few decades in other Asian countries such as China, Korea and Thailand. Therefore most Japanese artists are still more interested to basically depict what they see or feel, using classical or post-modern techniques, rather than to address issues linked to society, politics or metaphysics... Conceptual art as such and even more the "relational aesthetics" proposed by French curator/philosopher Nicolas Bourriaud to explain trends in late 20th century art are alien to the Japanese approach. Therefore most of Japanese artists tend to stay on at the decorative level, as exemplified by several recent exhibitions surveying contemporary Japanese art such as Roppongi Crossing I (2004) and II (2007) at Mori Art Museum in Tokyo or the touring exhibition A Beautiful New World (2007) promoted by the Japan Foundation. Indeed, who could today think that the new world will be beautiful, except someone living on an island, isolated from the global issues which are making the work more and more scary and unpredictable every day ?

However, within the rather conservative art world described above, a few Japanese artists hopefully escape this generic status and investigate unknown territories. Among them we will present in this article two young artists who are able to mix Japanese tradition and Western influences in a novel manner and refer to deep and dark issues : Fuyuko Matsui and Toru Kamei. They produce complex and intriguing paintings which can be interpreted in many ways and connect to both Western and Eastern art histories, echoing forgotten memories from the Baroque period (re)mixed with contemporary feelings. Baroque is an interesting twilight period that followed the bright masterworks of the Renaissance and which is indeed richer and more complex. Darker times were coming, wars and religious fights were endemic, as were natural calamities (e.g. plague). Sophistication and decadence thus intermingled, and Good and Evil, light and shadow, life and death were the daily protagonists pictured in the art world, through complex allegories and sophisticated formal structures in which curves and serpentine lines replaced the square, chessboard-like compositions of the High Renaissance.

Several art theorists, such as French philosopher Christine Buci-Glucksmann, have pointed out the relationships between the Baroque period and the European contemporary art of the late 20th century.

Maybe the same could be done for a few Japanese artists of the early 21st century. Indeed a few other painters, such as Hiroki Tsukuda and Akiyoshi Mishima, are also influenced by the Western Baroque imagery, although their techniques are rather focusing on collages and graphical remixes.

Fuyuko Matsui

Fuyuko Matsui was born in 1974 in the Shizuoka prefecture in South-East Japan. She has become in the last years one of the most promising Japanese artist, and she attracted attention from the media because she uses nihon-ga, the traditional Japanese painting technique. 2006 was the year when so-called "neo-nihonga" emerged as a new movement in Japanese contemporary art with two main exhibitions, From Nihonga to Nihonga at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, in April 2006, and Nihonga Painting: Six Provocative Artists at Yokohama Museum of Art in August 2006, both including works by Fuyuko Matsui. But her style is very different from other artists (e.g. Hisashi Tenmyouma, Akira Yamagouchi, Mami

亀井亨
《但愿保住秘密》
亚麻布上油画

Toru Kamei
Desire Kept Secret
Oil on Linen
Mounted on Board

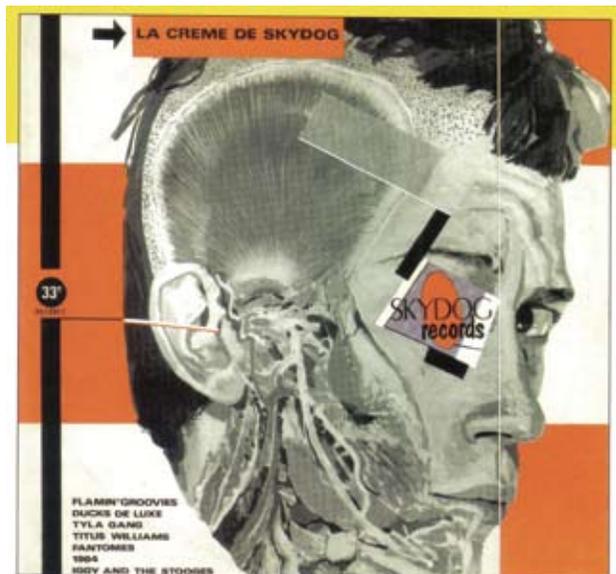
2007



卢鲁·毕加索
《封面纪录》
朋克绘画（法国）

Loulou Picasso
Record Cover
Skydog Records
(France)

1978



Kosemura) who are using references to basic elements of traditional Japanese culture as the themes of their works, reinterpreted with new techniques and sometimes ironic twists. Matsui is just doing the contrary: for her, nihonga is only a technique, which she prefers to oil painting, but the subjects of her paintings are digging deeply in her own psyche, creating thus the complexity and weirdness of these artworks. Moreover, the enigmatic titles that she gives to her paintings are puzzling and surprising spectators, as there are no obvious clues relating paintings and titles. Her works are sometimes qualified in the press as "grotesque" or "supernatural", but Matsui laughs and does not care, and she even likes it when people use the term "grotesque". She is happy to make people uneasy as she wants to touch lower, physical senses. Some of her paintings such as "Nyctalopia" and other paintings depicting strange ghostly figures are even scary and one feels that she actually captures a real ghost on the paper... This refers to the tradition of yurei-ga (ghost painting), represented in Japan by masters such as Kyosai Kawanabe in the 19th century. Matsui knows very well yurei-ga because it was actually the subject of the doctoral

dissertation that she passed in 2007 at the National School of Fine Arts and Music in Tokyo, being thus the first woman to get a doctoral degree in traditional Japanese painting from this prestigious school - the first man being Takashi Murakami a decade ago. However, Matsui takes liberty with traditional technique and in particular does not use pure line drawing to represent faces as in classical yurei-ga. Indeed, she comes from the Shizuoka prefecture where there is a lot of light and contrast, but when she went to visit Kyoto or Nara in winter she was fascinated by the fog and mist and therefore wanted to recreate this feeling of indistinct vision in her ghost paintings.

安德里亚斯著作的
木刻印刷品
(重印于18世纪)

Woodcut Print From
Andreas Vesalius
(Reprint From 18th
Century)



But Matsui also takes the subjects of her paintings in the Western art history, as she chooses whatever triggers her own sensibility. Her masterpiece Keeping up the Purenness refers to anatomical waxes that were one of the curiosities of the Baroque period and regained attention with the exhibitions l'ame au corps (Paris, 1993) curated by Jean Clair and Spectacular Bodies curated by Martin Kemp (London, 1999). More precisely Keeping up the pureness depicts one of the "Medical Venus" of Clemente Susini, the master of ceroplastica (anatomical waxes) in the 18th century, which can be seen at the Museo La Specola in Firenze. But in Matsui's painting, this "Venus" with her belly rip open showing her internal organs is set in very peaceful surroundings in the middle of delicate flowers... How to interpret and react to such a painting? Maybe by remarking that it echoes another masterpiece of contemporary art: Marcel Duchamp's Etant donne' : 1) la chute d'eau 2) le gaz d'eclairage (1968). In Duchamp's installation, showing a strange countryside scene where one can distinguish a naked (and wounded?) woman, the spectator is explicitly put in the position of a "voyeur". As Duchamp said, "ce sont les regardeurs qui font l'oeuvre" ("the spectators are making the artwork") and it is conceivable that Duchamp's artwork lies, beyond the installation itself, in its ability to create the troubled state of mind in the spectator's psyche. The same is certainly true for Matsui's work. Following her anatomy-related works, two recent (still untitled) paintings by Matsui are twisted self-portraits depicting in a see-through manner an exposed backbone with metallic implants replacing a few vertebrae. They not only refer to her own life and (although less dramatic) injuries but are also echoing the weird fascination for wounded, deformed bodies and the symbiosis of flesh and metal that can be found in the books of J. G. Ballard from the early 70's, in particular in his novels The Atrocity Exhibition (1970) and Crash (1973), the later having been adapted into a film in 1996 by David Cronenberg - a movie that Matsui knows and loves. In a similar mood, some artworks from the late 70's by the French artist Loulou Picasso, a member of the punk graphic collective Bazoooka, also depict internal anatomical details in a see-through manner.

From a formal point of view, most of Matsui's paintings mix Japanese nihonga technique with a western way of representing human figures. Bodies postures and gestures always use curves lines in a dynamic way and create this "serpentine line" reminiscent of the Italian Mannerism and Baroque, as seen for instance in the works of Pontormo, Bronzino or Bernini. Also in the case of the frontal portrait of a woman with the enigmatic title *Eternal Almighty Medicine for Perfect Happiness*, the composition is similar to High Renaissance or early Mannerist portraits. However, as the woman depicted has some part of her skull scraped out, exposing the brain and some unidentified vessels, no doubt that something strange is at stakes. Hence, if the form is ancient, referring maybe to some illustrations from Andreas Vesalius's *de humani corporis fabrica*, the first medical book about anatomy back in 1543, the content is contemporary: it is not only the brain escaping the skull that Matsui is depicting, it is also the psychological state of mind in contemporary societies where alienation and split personalities have to coexist within one self due to new technologies (mobile phones, Internet) which can be sometimes intrusive. Indeed the women in *Eternal Almighty Medicine for Perfect Happiness* is losing her brain in the actual sense... is it the cure for perfect happiness today ? In several other paintings human figures are losing some of their internal organs, but seem not too care so much: is it a metaphor of people who are falling apart but do not realize it ? One should never forget that in many such works the basic idea is to reach the soul by depicting the body. Hence all these paintings talk

about contemporary society; and for Matsui, the future is dark, there is no utopia. But Matsui is not afraid of contemporary society, she is just lucid and surprised that so many Japanese artists are trying to avoid reality and the problems of our post-modern world. An interesting and amusing fact is that when she paints in her workshop, she listen to techno music (Richie Hawtin / Plastikman) as the repetitive beats put her in a trance where she can be totally immersed into the painting. Minimal Techno as the soundtrack of traditional Japanese painting...Welcome to the 21st century !

Toru Kamei

Toru Kamei is born in 1976 and started painting while in high-school at the age of 15, learning classical drawing and oil painting for 10 years before defining his own style. Oil painting can be seen as a classical Western medium, but one should not forget that there is also a tradition of oil painting in Japan. Indeed once introduced in Japan after the Meiji restoration in 1868, it took less than a decade for Japanese painters to master it, as exemplified by the realism of Yuichi Takahashi's *Salmon* in 1877. But why choosing oil painting, and why is realism so important in painting ? Kamei finds it difficult to express someone's feeling and considers that information is better conveyed through vision, hence the importance of realism. Mastering realistic representation with oil painting was the key that enabled him to give shape to feelings and emotions, deeper than abstraction. However,



左：
龟井亨
《所有的花与昆虫》系列
亚麻布上油画

Left:
Toru Kamei
**All the Flowers
and Insects series**
Oil on Linen
Mounted on
Board

2007

右：
龟井亨
《所有的花与昆虫》系列
亚麻布上油画

Right:
Toru Kamei
**All the Flowers
and Insects series**
Oil on Linen
Mounted on
Board

2007

松井冬子
《保持纯洁》
丝上彩绘

Fuyuko Matsui
**Keeping up the
Pureness**
Color on Silk

2004



using one particular technique or another is not so important; the key point is the ability to communicate, the opportunity of dialogue that is created through the painting. Peculiar for an artist of the 21st century, and even more for a Japanese artist, Kamei started since 2004 the series all the flowers and insects, which is his own reinterpretation of the vanitas ("vanities"), a Baroque genre originating in Dutch paintings from the 17th century. The original vanitas paintings were allegories of the vanity of all things on earth and aimed at making the spectator aware of the omnipresence of death in the material world and hence of the importance of the eternal, spiritual world. Kamei has always been interested by the theme of death in European Middle Ages religious paintings, e.g. in the Dance of Death or the memento mori ("remember death") frescoes from the 15th century, which were the ancestors of the later vanitas genre. In his series all the flowers and insects, Kamei depicts a skull, representing himself, surrounded by flowers, insects and eyes. Flowers are of course present in Baroque vanitas paintings, as they represent ephemeral beauty, but Kamei uses them in a different way: they represent another form of life and are like attracted to the skull in order to somehow provide a symbolic shelter. His other paintings of animals completely covered by flowers, as if to deceive the spectator or hide from him, are continuing along the same lines. Eyes have also a special meaning in Kamei's paintings: they represent a life-form stronger than human beings, and there is thus a contrast between the fragility of life and the power of those abstract life-forms. He says that he sometime feels like being watched while painting and wanted to represent such feelings on the canvas.

Indeed, as with Matsui's, Japanese audience has difficulties to cope with Kamei's paintings and to understand the real meaning (or meanings) of these works. Some people even consider his

vanitas paintings to be "cheap horror movies". Aware of such misinterpretations, Kamei says that he would be happy if only 1% of the spectators connect and appreciate his works. If his vanitas are hidden self-portraits, some other paintings are clear self-portraits, sometime reusing stereotypes from Buddhism or Hinduism imagery. But he always depicts himself naked, as to eliminate all references to culture, time and space. Just a human being, naked, extemporal but ephemeral.

Conclusion

Matsui's and Kamei's paintings are complex mixes or remixes of various influences from both tradition and modernity, East and West, culture and nature. They somehow create a bridge over time and space, crossing over Italian Manierism, Dutch Baroque and Japanese traditions, as themes are recurrent and reappear in various time and places.

How does this relate to the future of contemporary Japanese art?

Currently, many artists are doing some kind of cultural window shopping, picking up good things with no sense of critic. But according to Matsui and Kamei, there is maybe now more chance for outsiders. Something should come out with no reference to nationality, history or geography. It will not represent Japan as such, but maybe just Tokyo, a generic lifestyle in modern megapolis, which could also connect to the rest of the world and have some global resonance.