



Thinking Woman 1972-3 Fresco and strappo on canvas

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My father at his atelier

Miho Kinutani, Curator of Koji Kinutani Tenku Art Museum

My father is a funny and big-hearted man at home. He can be strict at times, but basically he is always thinking about fun things and tells me to be cheerful and positive. Meanwhile, he teaches me the importance of having eyes that can see things from diverse aspects through his pictures.

On an average day, he is either painting pictures or on the road, travelling all over Japan busy judging at contests or attending conferences. At home he gets up earlier than anyone else, and is already in his atelier painting by six o'clock in the morning. He comes back to the kitchen for breakfast. As soon as he finishes eating, he goes back to his atelier upstairs with a cup of coffee in his hand. This 365-day routine has not changed for years. When I look into the atelier to announce a visitor or a telephone call, he stares at the canvas with wide open eyes, or sometimes narrowed eyes as if gazing far away, in his work clothes stained with paint. The atelier is always filled with the bright natural light of morning and the sound of cheerful music from the radio.

He has been painting for over 50 years without missing a day. The smooth movement of his brush is rhythmic, almost like music. Various colors are created and transported across to form the picture. In the process, perhaps his daily trained spirit is unconsciously expressing deep thoughts inside him. I think it is the very moment when art is coming into being, from the joy in his everyday life and also from the pain.

Art means to live for him who says "Art is my Life". He expresses his flowing power of imagination in colors, and uses his explosive energy to make people feel inspired by his pictures.

I am not an artist. So art is not my life. Still, if possible I want to live a life that can make the statement "Life is Art" when I feel "How artistic life is!"



At the event to celebrate the number of visitors exceeding 100,000 With her father Koji Kinutani, Takashi Uchida, Museum Director



On the Lido in Venice 1972 Fresco and strappo on canvas

Description of a work: “On the Lido in Venice”

Akio Takahashi, Assistant curator of
Koji Kinutani Tenku Art Museum

Lido di Venezia is a narrow island located in the south of Venice, north-eastern Italy. It is also known as the venue for Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Cinematografica (Venice International Film Festival). It is also a resort site attracting a great many visitors from Europe during the vacation season.

Here, we are introducing “On the Lido in Venice”, painted in 1972, shortly after Kinutani went to Italy for study. It shows a period of entertainment on Lido island when he enjoyed clam digging during a break in his studies. The picture shows several people lying under a colorful parasol listening to the peaceful sound of waves on a hazy yet sunny day. A picnic sheet is laid on the beach. It could be in the morning or in the evening, judging from the shadow cast by the parasol. As if

to prove it, pale pink is painted underneath the blue paint in the sky. It is a very different painting style from his current one. Still, we can see the skill and artistic sense of the artist from the use of color and partially drawn outlines. The overall impression of the work is a long and leisurely time depicted in pale colors as if it were a daydream. It is a finished work, complete with the artist's signature, yet it resembles a rough picture or a sketch, an uncompleted work.

However, this “On the Lido in Venice” definitely occupies a position of an important piece among his early works, showing the sign of outlines freely running all over the canvas, which symbolizes the post-1970s Kinutani style. In this work description, the uncommon features and charm of this picture are unfolded while we follow the background of its creation.

The works of Kinutani prior to “On the Lido in Venice”, that is, those from the time at Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music, were very different from his current style. They were based in monochrome, composed in the motif of human bodies and indoor space where the gradation effect unique to monochrome pictures imparts a profound elegance with an air of deep spirituality. Good examples are “Blue Interval” which won the Ohashi Prize in the Graduation Exhibition and “Melodic Trick” painted in the same year winning the Dokuritsu (Independent) Prize. In this style of finding forms in chaotic space, the fluid creation visibly shows contingency, and the perplexity and hesitance of the artist. His monochrome pictures in this period drew high praise. He was selected to be a member of the Dokuritsu Bijutsu Kyokai (Independent Art Association) in 1968. However, his style underwent a marked change as a result of the study experience in Italy and a transformation took place, to the current Kinutani style.

In 1971, when he was an assistant at Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music, he was invited to Italy by Bruno Saetti, professor of Academy of Fine Arts of Venice, and went there to study the affresco classic painting method. Many young artists at that time were interested in modern art in New York, but Kinutani came across the burnt mural paintings of the main hall of Horyuji Temple in his third year in the university and was charmed by the presence and appeal only murals can offer. He believed “the Path to the next creation lies nowhere but in the forgotten skill and sensitivity”. He chose the old town in Italy without a second thought. Kinutani recalls his first impression of Italy. “When I breathed in the air, the Japanese factors which had been binding me fell away, and I felt I could accept any luster of Italy, be it red or blue (“Autobiography” by Koji Kinutani).” The delicious food and wine, and more than anything, the Italian lifestyle where people sing songs cheerfully and happily, love others, and live with devout prayer in the heart had a profound impact on the life and art of Kinutani. It formed the foundation of the current Kinutani style, full of rich colors and energy. Mastering the outline that runs around freely on the canvas is attributed to this opportunity.

Kinutani began to be aware of outlines when he studied classic murals through replicating affresco during his stay in Venice. The production process of affresco classic murals is explained in the previous edition (Melody of Firmament vol.1). Production is bound by temporal restriction due to the nature of the material. In other words, the work has to be finished in a short time. In order to do this, it is essential to have a clear idea beforehand. Before painting, it is necessary to prepare a sketch and decide on the outlines. That is, being aware of drawing outline was inevitable in affresco classic mural production. During this training period (1971-1972), Kinutani made affresco replications of the works of Giotto and Piero della Francesca, painters in the early Italian Renaissance period. In this actual reproduction of classic mural style, he mastered the process and recognized the importance of outlines in pictures. Furthermore, the outlines became more fluid and rhythmic in his free work painted as a reaction to the rigid replicating training, and sublimated them to an independent appearance. This was the origin of the outlines of Kinutani, drawn flowingly and meticulously, integrating the whole work. [1]

At the same time, the outlines are heavily connected with the colors of the work. The existence of the outlines that minutely express even human emotions dispels the hesitation or worries at the production, and freed the rich expression in primary colors accumulated in the memory of Kinutani. [2] This is how the “brilliant coloring” symbolizing today's Kinutani art was born.



Melodic Trick 1966 Oil painting

“On the Lido in Venice” was painted as a free work during this training period, which can be seen as a turning point in the development of the Kinutani style. When you look at the picture in consideration for such a background, some features were shared with the oil paintings during his years at the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music; the motif of the human body limply lying and the production of quiet space as a whole. On the other hand, the colors, even though they are pale, can be understood as an escape from the traditional monochrome base, and as a sign toward the bright colors. Also, as previously noted, a major reaction is observed in the outlines from the minute and solemn production repeated in the replicating training. They are drawn freely as if flowing and humming, but forcefully in some parts, giving the impression of some conviction. From there, can we see fragments of various emotions; moments of brilliance Kinutani observed in the wave of free images at that time, expectation for creation yet to be seen, and joy of painting? In other words, I think we can observe momentary features only available during this period of Kinutani style making a significant change and becoming established.



Girl with a Floral Decoration 1981 Fresco and strappo on canvas
Work painted in 1980s with outlines drawn which effectively tighten the canvas

Moreover, the peculiarity of this work does not stop there. What intrigues me most is that “outlines and colors cohabitate (not coexist) together”. To “cohabitate” means any lack of either party will not achieve the effect. For example, if we see this work in gray scale, its charm is lost to a large extent, and the outlines will lose their significance, and vice versa. It is the harmony built on a delicate balance between the colors and outlines, just like the tunes and lyrics fuse together in a canzone. It gives viewers an impression where life is breathed into the mass of colors painted in the freed image world by drawing rhythmical outlines. We can say this is a rare case in the diverse Kinutani style which continuously evolves by always seeking the possibility of new expression.

When I first encountered this work, I felt it had a somewhat unfinished beauty. It could have come from this “cohabitation”. That is to say, the established style was almost completed and the work had a high degree of perfection, yet the final touch was unfinished in the style. That was the very reason for the beautiful harmony where the outlines and colors complement each other. Compared with his works in other periods, the beautiful harmony is somewhat peculiar, but we can feel the fresh charm inviting us to anticipate the conviction to come in the future. In addition, I assume the miraculous harmony caused by the unfinished style was not the intention of Kinutani himself, and he stopped painting at that point when he welcomed the harmony.

As is explained so far, this “On the Lido in Venice” is a work possessing rare features and charm among the diversity of the Kinutani style. It appears to be a vague image like a daydream, but when examined carefully, it is a radical process of challenge in a gap between academism and modernism created by a young affresco painter who is versed both in classical and new. Viewers can catch a glimpse of the exact moment of Kinutani art coming into being to the world which would decorate his elaborate career.

[1] Kinutani visited the Museo d'Arte Orientale di Venezia (Oriental Art Museum Venice) many times during his stay in Italy. The purpose was to learn the sophisticated Japanese “culture of lines” from painted ukiyo-e and to build a new style of expression by learning the skills and sensitivity that make up its origin, just as he did with the study of affresco classic murals. In this way, the origin of Kinutani art lies in deep interest in the art history of East and West and to see the West as a “culture of colors” and the East as a “culture of lines” with both eyes.

[2] The lines of Kinutani are in black only, and do not change their character in the thickness. That is, the lines integrating the whole canvas do not only give an equal value to every corner but also equalize the role of colors by outlining the colors themselves in an even line. The perspective by value of colors or the perspective of the shades is changed completely by the lines, and the canvas becomes a solid plane. This is where the essence of the lines in Kinutani Art lies

Strappo technique

Strappo is a special technique to remove several millimeters of the surface of an affresco on a wall (colored layer) and transfer the layer onto canvas to make a portable artwork. The “On the Lido in Venice” described in this edition and the affresco masterpiece “Arabesque” were also removed from a wall. We would like to introduce the process of this strappo technique here.

The strappo technique starts with covering the painted surface of affresco with thick gauze (cheesecloth) and applying a thick coat of animal glue all over it. Animal glue is made by boiling down animal bones and hides. It serves as an adhesive, mainly used as a medium for pigments in oriental paintings. In the strappo technique, the surface of an affresco is removed by the adhesion of this animal glue. It takes approx. 12 to 24 hours to dry the animal glue, depending on the season. After the glue is completely dried, the covering cheesecloth is removed. The surface of the affresco (colored layer) stuck with the cheesecloth comes off together. The back of the affresco, which is not usually seen, can be observed at this stage. After that, the back of the removed affresco surface is stretched well, applied with water insoluble adhesive, and lined with new cheesecloth or linen cloth. Finally boiling water is applied to remove the cheesecloth (animal glue melts in hot water). The surface of the dried affresco is covered with a hard and clear glassy membrane. So the colors do not come off when boiling water is applied and scrubbed with a brush.

Affresco can be displayed at an exhibition venue after this process. Traditionally the strappo technique was created for use in repair work of murals in churches, cathedrals and chapels. Thanks to this strappo technique, affresco works can be exhibited in museums as modern art and draw the attention of numerous people.

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By the way, at this Tenku Art Museum, a VTR with a detailed recording of the strappo technique (strappo of “City of Radiant Light”) is shown in front of the Koji Kinutani atelier.



Scenes from ICOM KYOTO 2019



Mr. Kinutani with the original picture of the official poster

The 25th ICOM (International Council of Museums) General Conference Kyoto was held from September 1 – 7, 2019, for which Mr. Koji Kinutani painted the original picture of the official poster. We, the staff of Tenku Art Museum, attended the opening ceremony with Mr. Koji Kinutani. ICOM is an international institution established in 1946 by museums and experts throughout the world for the development of museums. This General Conference Kyoto was memorable because it was the first ICOM General Conference held in Japan. The opening ceremony was held in a resplendent atmosphere where interested parties from all over the world came together. Discussions and seminars by experts were held during the period to facilitate sharing information and expertise. An excursion (interactive tour) was held on the sixth day and 58 ICOM participants visited the Tenku Art Museum. Mr. Kinutani offered an explanation of his works by himself without prior notice, and the participants were delighted with this precious experience of a talk by the artist.



Mr. Kinutani offering explanation of his own works at ICOM excursion of museum people from all over the world



Scene from the exhibition held in the workshop space

JQA International Environmental Children's Drawing Contest

33 prize winning works of the 20th "JQA International Environmental Children's Drawing Contest" were displayed at Koji Kinutani Tenku Art Museum (October 2 – November 1, 2019). Mr. Koji Kinutani served as Chairman of judging Committee. This contest is held in the hope of providing children with an opportunity to draw their impression by the nature around them and to think about the global environment. The works are submitted from all over the world with various motifs including the vastness of nature, the townscape where they are born and raised, their favorite animals and loving families, painted in bright colors from honest perspectives.

The children who created the displayed works and their families also visited the museum during the period, and we could enjoy a fun and enriching exhibition.

Announcement from the museum

Joined Kansai Museum Association, The Japanese Council of Art Museums and Japanese Association of Museums.

Koji Kinutani Tenku Art Museum joined Kansai Museum Association, The Japanese Council of Art Museums and Japanese Association of Museums during its activities since the last fiscal year.

First, membership of Kansai Museum Association, was approved at the "158th Kansai Museum Association Annual Convention" held on April 18, 2019. Kansai Museum Association is an association of museums, art museums and equivalent institutions mainly in the Kansai area to cooperate for improvement of their operation and mutual friendship among the institutions, together with contribution to the development of culture through its activities.

Next, the new membership as a regular member of The Japanese Council of Art Museums was approved at the "68th Japanese Council of Art Museums General Assembly" held in Sapporo on May 22, 2019. The Japanese Council of Art Museums consists of 394 regular membership museums, 20 individual members, and 52 supporting member institutions. The purpose of this largest museum organization in Japan is to sponsor general assembly, commemorative forum at the general assembly, lectures, curator training sessions, and research committees every year and to share the results with the member museums and interested parties in a wider scope as well as with the public population in order to support the achievement of art museum mission and to establish their activities firmly in the society.

In addition, on February 10, 2020, approval was given for membership of Japanese Association of Museums, which consists of museums all over Japan. The Japanese Association of Museums was established in 1928 as a central authority for cross-sectional museum development beyond the founders or the types among the various institutions which include history museums, folk museums, art museums, science museums, zoos, aquariums and botanical gardens. Today, this organization provides information on the trend concerning national and folk museums, while summarizing the current situations/problems of museums in appropriately promoting administrations and founders as well as various projects such as research studies, museum staff training, and annual museum conventions.

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