



The World of Takami Sakurai's Paintings 6

by Osamu Fukano

Sakurai's paintings of this second period are beautiful to the point of being almost magical. However, this beauty is not decorative or aesthetic. If decorative beauty is a service to the comfort of petty-bourgeois life (as is the case with many market-oriented paintings), Sakurai's paintings are established in a place where he clearly wants to reject such beauty. This may be the general reason why Sakurai's paintings are still held back by many who do not understand them.

Sakurai, however, does not paint as an ideological slogan. He is challenging the question, "What is a human being?" To borrow Gauguin's theme again, "Where did we come from, who are we, and where are we going?" He pursues the answer with his paintings.

A further turning point in his flamboyant work during his stay in the U.S. came around the time of his departure for France in 1974. His paintings, full of bright colors such as yellow, blue, and green, gradually evolved to black and red as the main tones of expression. Accordingly, countless human figures appear in the paintings. Dozens, even hundreds of them. Many of them have their hands raised in a banzai-like gesture, surrounded by floating clouds reminiscent of the auspicious clouds in Japanese Buddhist paintings, painted in the style of Sotatsu. The representation is extremely

simple. The figures are bordered by simple black lines, or have breasts that are merely drawn in small dots. They have eyes like a child's drawing. Their bodies and faces are red. The surroundings are painted a glossy black. Sometimes arrows or numbers appear.

This world is the product of Takami Sakurai's progression from the individual to society, as he has gone deeper into his contemplation of mankind since his days in San Francisco.