



Trajectory of the Avant-garde

Nishinippon Shinbun Culture section

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The "Kyushu-Ha Exhibition" at the Fukuoka City Museum of Art (until October 1). The exhibition, "Kyushu-Ha" (until October 1; closed on Mondays), is receiving a favorable response. Kyushu-Ha is an avant-garde art group from Fukuoka that made a bold statement in Tokyo around 1960 with its "anti-art" style of amorphous paintings and bizarre objet d'art. Their activities, which exploded at a time when Japan was shaken by the Security Treaty and Miike disputes, are described in detail in the series "Kyushu-Ha and the Age of the Avant-garde that Ran Through" in this column. A quarter of a century has passed since then. How have these avant-garde artists, who gave a shock to postwar art, lived after the storm has passed? Of the 50 members of the group, we have traced the paths of a few typical ones who continue to work energetically and remain committed to "Kyushu-Ha" to this day.

Sakurai's ideology changes dramatically when he comes to the U.S.

Kyushu-Ha was a group of friends without a representative. But everyone seemed to recognize Takami Sakurai, a charismatic man with a beard who had the power to convince everyone by waving his hands in the air, bubbling and ranting, as the leader of the group.

Sakurai, who has lived in France for 15 years, is very excited. Usually, he returns to Japan in the summer, holds solo exhibitions in several cities, and then quickly retreats, but this year, he came to Fukuoka early in April and has not yet returned. This year, however, he came to Fukuoka early in April and has not yet returned. He even seems poised to use the success of the "Kyushu-Ha

Exhibition" to launch a new movement.

He says, "I will take over the world," knowing that art can only come from individual artists through the Kyushu-ha movement, but he has been moving around energetically for five months and is now repeating his performances. Is it that he cannot stand the situation of Japanese art, which seems to have been taken over by commercialism, even though he lives abroad?

Kyushu-Ha Exhibition" was held three times.

Sakurai, who created unformel paintings using asphalt and sand and objects made from car tires and other materials during his time at Kyushu-Ha, has changed dramatically since his first trip to the United States in 1965.

Kyushu-Ha, which boasted of a certain unity despite its repeated breakups and dispersions, could no longer hide its fissures in the late 1960s. Sakurai, who had tried to incorporate avant-garde art into Kyushu's culture in a self-serving manner but failed, turned his attention to the United States, which had risen to the center of contemporary art, with his characteristic boldness, saying, "I have never been frustrated before. He left the company he worked for and headed for San Francisco, saying, "I'm going to make my abilities known.

While working part-time as a painter, he organized the first Kyushu-Ha exhibition, the "Negative Exhibition" (1966), with foreign artists and Masao Urata (now in Tokyo). With Ochi Osamu (Fukuoka City) and others, who arrived one year later, he held the second Kyushu-Ha exhibition (1967), adding works sent from Kyushu. The third exhibition (1968) was held by Ochi and Urata while Sakurai was back in Japan. Sakurai's love affair with Kyushu-Ha and the group movement continued in the U.S. In his second trip to the U.S. in 1970, Sakurai started a konnyaku commune that included foreign poets and musicians.

Enlightenment with LSD

San Francisco, where hippies were rampant, decisively changed Sakurai's view of art. It was LSD and religion. Wandering in a visionary world on LSD. He encountered Hindu tantra (mandala-like paintings depicting the path to heaven).

"I was amazed to see a girl and a cow having sex. The cow, however, was the transformed form of God. When you realize that, it's really beautiful." When he learned about the world of illusion and religion, he said, "Painting is an expression of emotion. He simply abandoned abstract painting. It was the year after his first trip to the United States.

Sakurai, "instantly enlightened by LSD," creates images of women with big eyes while copying Hindu paintings. It could be a woman surrounded by flowers or an angel with wings on her back. It was the beginning of the "Road to Paradise" series, which continues to this day. 'I had neither the avant-garde nor Europe in mind. It was about religion and spirit. The hippie idea of "love and peace" was the groundwork.

It also adds an oriental touch.

But Europe was still on his mind. The ambition to "take on the world" also reared its head.

To take the world, I have to make it work in New York or Paris. That's a provincial idea, isn't it? So, in 1973, he went to France. Since then, he has formed the group "Kusguri" and held exhibitions, had solo shows in Paris, Tokyo, and Fukuoka, exhibited at the Salon de Mai, and signed contracts with leading galleries in Paris, and has been actively expanding his activities.

Sakurai's paintings often feature intense images of red and black as the main colors, such as countless women chanting "Hail to the Lord" and angels with multiple eyes. They are an ode to humanity, but also a skepticism that the road to heaven is not so easy. The addition of an oriental atmosphere to the works explores a new aspect of the artist's work.

"Get over me"

"It's embarrassing to be sixty, but I still want to take on the world, and I want to rise to the top.

Because he is such a man, it is frustrating that few painters have emerged from the former Kyushu-Ha who are recognized even in the center of the country. He said, "If you don't survive as an artist, there is no meaning. Only those who survive are interesting. Go beyond me, kick me down," he cries. He provokes his former colleagues by saying, "Come and fight with me." But it has been many years since Kyushu-Ha, and most of the members are now in their mid-fifties and on their own paths. Naturally, the response was small. Still, I don't mind. Perhaps it is because they have become more confident as writers that they can do it all by themselves in the end.

