

My Philosophy Tomokazu Sakurai

Most of my paintings, regardless of size, are on square canvases or wood panels. At first, I used cloth canvases, but the strong wood paneling is definitely superior in compensating for the fatal defects caused by the elasticity of the cloth itself, so the canvas is no longer used. For me, the square shape is a substitute for the circle.

Sometimes I apply two or three coats of titanium white as ground coat, and sometimes I work directly on the surface without any ground coat, but I never start with a drawing. This is a limitation of the technique of using layers. While I am aware of these technical constraints, I make decisions intuitively according to my mood at any given time.

The paintings I am working on now are abstract paintings that do not rely on subject matter or content, and are generally referred to as "works of the spirit or soul". These paintings are called "pure art" because they are created by freeing each line and each screen from the purpose of service and purify them as much as possible. For me, for example, when I think about what is essentially a pure line, I feel that it is an act, a gesture. By purifying the lines, it is not burdened with the role of a contour line that expresses form. This prevents figurative motifs from appearing on the canvas.

It is said that the work of the soul exists only in "action," and I understand that human existence is an act itself. I strongly feel that it expresses the essence of things more than what we see. It was about 10 years ago that I became aware that I did not know what I was really seeing. I was strolling along the rows of cherry trees by the river near my house, gazing at the cherry blossoms in full bloom and was thinking, "They are beautiful this year, too." When suddenly I was enveloped in a soft sense of happiness. At that time, I suddenly wondered, "What exactly do I think is beautiful about cherry blossoms?"

It was indeed beautiful in its own way. I looked at the cherry blossoms and saw the shape of a small light pink flower, the same shape I saw in my mind when I closed my eyes. If I think it is beautiful, it is beautiful, but what I see is just a cherry blossom and nothing else.

Then I wondered if it wasn't the blossoms themselves, but the color of the rows of cherry trees that contained them. Then I looked at the sky, and sure enough, the sky was a pale grayish blue with a hint of humidity and a strip of light pink cherry blossoms. However, the reason why Japanese people find this scenery especially beautiful is because of our individual memories of this seasonal event.

Or is it that I no longer see what people really see as beautiful? Before that, what does it mean to feel beautiful? I came to the conclusion that what we perceive as beautiful may be unconsciously determined through situations, experiences, and knowledge. I concluded that the experiences and the knowledge we have unconsciously overlapped with our daily visual images of the cherry blossoms and we reflexively assume that cherry blossoms are beautiful. After this day, I began to feel that what I thought I was seeing was not what I was actually seeing. When I began to think about it, it seems to me that painting according to subject or content is the same thing. I became interested only in paintings that did not rely on these

things, and in which the world is completed within the artwork.

I think that the paintings I am making now are a symbolic expression of the lines, surfaces, and colors themselves, freeing them from subject matter and content, and overlaying them on the screen to create a single work of art. I use a technique called layering to keep the purified line layers and the painted layers equal without disturbing each other. My term "layered" is synonymous to the use of multiple layers of celluloid-like images, as in animation.

When creating a painting, the wood panel is turned. This was the method of production practiced by Willem de Kooning, whom I admire, and I started by imitating him with sole aim of getting closer to him. As soon as I started using this technique, the results were immediately apparent. The hierarchical relationship changes many times in the process of producing. I understand that this is an excellent technique to break the conventional academic structure very easily. As I turn the square screen, the top, bottom and center focus constantly change, and as I continue to paint, a screen appears where every part of the painting is kept equal. The production is terminated when the artist feels that he or she can no longer continue to build on the work. Then I decide which side should be the top. The work is made so that it can be viewed from any side, but considering that it is placed on the wall, it is necessary to have a top and bottom side. The side that gives the most unstable sensation should be chosen. Next, I sign my name on the right side of the screen and draw the year of creation on the reverse side. The intention of placing the sign on the side of the work was to prove that the side of the work is not the work. If time passes and you are ready to add new layers, you can start drawing over it again. For me, I don't have a sense of "completion" of the work. All works are incomplete and I continue to search for the ideals and principles of the painting.

My paintings are two or more layers of paintings. The most important thing is that the work should be sufficiently complete in one layer, whether the layer is painted or drawn. The depth of the painting is enhanced by the overlapping of all the layers, and they dissolve in complexity to form a single painting.

When I feel that I have created a work of art, I feel very happy. This may have something to do with my own fundamental thinking. I have an extreme hatred for the hierarchy, which has inhabited my body since childhood. That's why I want the layers to be independent and equal. Layering reveals a fascinating space where the layers dissolve completely to one work of art.

Now, this brings me to my father, Takami Sakurai. In fact, Takami was also intensely allergic to hierarchy. The order of the Kyushu School was maintained by the fact that lower members never obeyed their superiors and always tried to be equal, even when differences of opinion led to fist fights. There was no distinction between men and women, all were equal. Such awareness helped to create a new generation of painters. In an era where there were few female painters, Mitsuko Tabe grew up to become a representative artist of the Kyushu Ha. Recently, I have come to think that the fact that Takami was more like a delinquent older brother than a father to me, has nothing to do with the fact that he disliked the role as a family patriarch. He was rough and rowdy, but equally free of prejudice.

The paintings I am working on nowadays, fall into the genre of "structuralism".

Recently, I learned that Takami had a strong interest in the philosophy of "structuralism". Takami was a philosophy buff. Rather than liking it, he cultivated his own art in the field. I think. The tire object "implied", a precursor of the "Mono Ha", was exhibited at the Kyushu Ha of Language. The work shows the strong influence of Heidecker's idea of "the root of the work of art". I have been thinking about the romantic concept of "irony," which characterizes the new art as "making fun of the art itself instead of ridiculing someone or something in particular". The Kyushu Ha was strongly influenced by this concept. After moving to France in 1973, he developed a strong interest in "structuralism" and exchanged letters with Gilles Deleuze, a leading post-structuralist philosopher.

These actions and thoughts of Takami are strong, and I think we can understand the Kyushu school through his allergy to hierarchy and his fondness for philosophy. Now I inherited the genealogy of Takami's strong allergy to hierarchy, and I think that I am creating works with "structuralism" at the core, but I am not sure if it is the same as Takami's. I am proud to be a child of Takami just a little bit, at the same time.