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The Japan Times

ART

Go with the flow from representational to abstract BY MATTHEW LARKING SPECIAL TO THE JAPAN TIMES



Shinpei Kusanagi's 'The Ally', (2011) | Courtesy of Taka Ishii Gallery, Kyoto

For five years starting in 2007, Shinpei Kusanagi (b.1973) made monthly serialized paintings to accompany installments of Teru Miyamoto's novel "Mizu no Katachi" ("The Shape of Water") in the magazine éclat. Text and image had little to do with one another, though the small, standard format paintings (what the artist in fact refers to as "drawings") centered on views from Tokyo's Kiyosumi and Shirakawa districts.

"Where Water Comes Together With Other Water," which takes its title from a book of poems by Raymond Carver, is Taka Ishii Gallery, Kyoto's current show of 60 or so of these representational works, and the subsequent distillation of those experiences into abstraction. The narrative and connotative processual flows associated with the passage of water and Carver's poetry are found in the display of representational images, which have no titles and are meant to be viewed in the order that they are lined up — like the flow of a verse or of the rivers that course through the Kiyosumi and Shirakawa districts.

The small paintings evince an altogether Japanese aesthetic sensibility, with flowering morning glories recalling Edo Period Rinpa painting, snowed-over pine trees, irises, and cherry blossoms afloat the surface of a river. The artist wandered the Tokyo environs making small discoveries in the way tourists wander on the way to somewhere of significance, then spot something of interest along the way and take a picture. He then worked these discoveries into a series of paintings that offered ways of seeing and honing in on Tokyo's shitamachi ("downtown"), rather than on the more common focus of neon lights or urban sprawl. These works subsequently became the basis for the larger abstract paintings that draw away from realism. Conceived as a kind of ink painting or exercise in calligraphy (painted in one go and forgoing repainting), a thin solution of paint was applied, giving the feeling of suffused ink meandering through porous paper, similar to a painting technique called *nijimi*, in which ink is deliberately allowed to soak in and spread. The flow is, of course, controlled, as are modern waterways, though there is always an element of chance in the painterly application.

"Nowhere Now Here" is composed of circular rings, dots and swathes of watery paint, and the title indicates the significance of a place insignificantly found. The painting is related to the earlier serialized representational imagery, its centered geometric notations being reproductions of the negative spaces between the supporting pylons of a river-spanning bridge found in the earlier works.

While Kusanagi's abstractions de-familiarize his earlier, carefully rendered imagery, they do in a sense still refer to specific landscapes held in memory — ones blurred, diffused and near washed away, though recovered to a degree in the publication of his exhibitionaccompanying book, "Kiyosumi and Its Environs."

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クサナギシンペイ Shinpei Kusanagi 近圀、遠景 Near Place, Faraway Landscape



It was the end of July, and I was in Kagoshima. It had been three years since my first and はなかったか。あるいはそれは、松山で泊ま た手ぬぐいを肩にひっかけ靴を履き、 てのとき僕の混乱は 分が今どこに居るの 切り離されて、真っ暗な空間を漂っているよ 記憶の中の浴場といま見ているこの浴場の景色だけがくっ only visit - right after the earthquake. I'd never thought I would go back so soon, I had no real affinity to the city. Having taken care of my errands, I wandered the vaguely familiar streets for the rest of the day. I soon got tired of walking around and watching the locals pass by, and even though sun had not yet set, I entered a bar that looked decent enough and had some kushiyaki skewers and hot shochu. Since there were no other customers, 極みに達したのだった 1 spent some time talking to the bored-looking owner behind the counter. Before long I か さえもが定か was full and without much left to talk about, I asked for the check a little after 8pm and headed off. I thought to myself, "It's too early to return to the hotel", yet I was feeling full and couldn't eat anymore. As I pondered what to do, I remembered that the pub owner had told me that there were several bathhouses in the area. A good bath and a few more 入口の扉 では無くな drinks sounded like a good option, and so navigating with my iPhone I walked the dark streets. He had told me that all the bathhouses in Kagoshima City used water from natural たホテルの話だったか うだ。 hot springs as it was a city with a rich supply of water from an active volcano nearby. I walked past the arcade, turned left at the traffic lights, walked through the park, across the ホテル うで big street and I was almost there. Looking up from my iPhone, I was suddenly filled with a sense of deja vu. I had been there before. I had walked that exact street. But I knew that きり 考えるのを諦め か was impossible... Somewhat bewildered, I entered the bathhouse. In the changing room I と重なり saw lockers with their locks broken, flower patterned tiles and a busted massage chair; by ぐの歩 。仙台、 then I was sure that I had been there before. 沖縄 合い 道脇に、 て風呂か Taking off my sweaty shirt, I soaked myself in the bath. The water tasted salty, and I tried 、他は全てぼやけ テレビを眺めてい to remember the last time I had been there. I had could to Kagoshima for the first time three years ago, so that must have been it. Had I come at night or in the afternoon? What か銅像が一 was I doing before that? Who was I with? I submerged myself in the water, yet still nothing came to my mind. I thought that maybe the bathhouse was near the hotel I stayed at last time, but I couldn't remember the name of the hotel or how it looked. I started to doubt

In front of me, the bathhouse interior matched perfectly with the one in my memory, but everything else was hazy and had no clear outlines, as if the bathhouse was a separate memory, floating in a dark space. I remembered that in the alley near the hotel where I stayed, two sculptures had been installed. Or was it the hotel in Matsuyama where the two sculptures were? Or Sendai, Okinawa, Kusatsu, Kyoto...? Memories of the places I had visited started to merge together, and I became confused as to where I actually was. I gave up on remembering, got out of the water, dried my body and put my sweaty shirt back on. I put the wet towel on my shoulder and slipped on my shoes. As I opened the door, the lady at the counter, who had been watching TV idly, said, "Thanks for visited again". My confusion reached its peak.

whether last time had really been the first time I visited Kagoshima.

もここを通ったことがある。まさか、と簡単に打ち消 は気兼ねなく 児島市内にある銭湯は にはまだ早すぎる。かといって、もうなにも食べたくはない たことを思い出す。そうだ、 って、車をつまみに焼酎のお湯わりをひっかける。時間が早いせいか他に客も見当たらず けでもないこの南の まみれの服を脱ぎ捨てて、舐めるとち た鍵のかからない脱衣かご、花柄の浴槽タ て時間を潰す。 の終 記憶を辿りながら街をぶらぶら 腹も満ち、話すこともなくなった頃合いで勘定を済ませ店を出て、時計を見ればまだ八時をまわったばかりだった。宿へ戻 街 、すべて天然温泉なのだという。水の豊富な街。火山 まさかこんな 風呂に入ろう。風呂に き建物が見えるはず、 よっとしょっぱい温泉に浸かりながら 1 ~ 、再び 、動かないマッサージチェア と画面から顔を上げると、ふと、既視感に包まれた。この景色を見たことがある。以前 えって、 して見つけた銭湯の暖簾を 行き交う人を眺め 。どうするかと思案するうちに、この辺りにも銭湯があるとさっき店の主が言っ また飲み直そう。そう決めて、携帯で地図をみながら暗くなった街を歩きだす 、街をぶらつくの の街。アーケ 、いったいいつこの場所に来たのだろうと考えてみる やはり確か くぐり、脱衣場へと足を踏み入れたところで、目に飛び込ん ードを抜けて信号を左折、公園をこえて大きな通り に、 にも飽きた夕暮 閑そうな店の 以前にもここを訪れたことがあるのだった。 れ前には とひ H きり他愛もないお喋り に付いた店の暖簾を 。鹿児島 、縁があ

たのか 訪れたのは前回が初めてなのだから 本当に前回が初めてだったのだろうか しかしなんて名前のホテルだったのか、どんな部屋だったか 。湯舟に顔を埋めても、なにも思い出せない 三年前のことに違いない 。 ただ 一つだけ 。それが夜だったのか昼だったのか 、それすらもやはり思 その時泊まっていたホテルはこの銭湯のわりと近所だった気がしたのだけ い出せないのだった なにをした後だったのか。誰と一緒だっ も像を結は 6 2 鹿児島に来たの

京都。過去に訪れた様々な場所の景色が混ざり溶け合っ 体を拭いて汗まみれの服を再び身に纏う。 たおばちゃんから「毎度」と声をかけられて 一体置かれ た。あれは まるでこの風呂場だけ 、鹿児島のホテルで 濡れ







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少し運く起きた冬の朝、ふとんにくるまっている。 ちょっとまぶしくて、でも目の前はぼんやりしていて、 頬をかすめる風は冷たいけれど、体はあたたかい。 もう夢の世界には戻れないけれど、外には出られない。 画家・クサナギシンペイさんが描くのは、そんな世界。 夢とうつつ、彼岸と此岸にまたがる「間」の世界のような……。 ここではないどこかへ行けるかは、自分次第です。 写真:江原隆司 文:上像桂子

Art for the Earth

or, towing voyage artwork Shinpei Kusanagi location altman siegel gallery

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できる代わりに、あやうい共 は、難しい概念を端的に表現 もしれない。言葉というもの 信している人に対して、言葉 絵という表現方法で何かを発 言葉は難しいですね。言葉に むけるわけでもなく、無視す 通認識によって意味が限定さ そう答えてくれた。確かに、 ているので」 必要はないんだけど、目をそ は、いつも正面から向き合う 現れ、絵の中がだんだんとに れてしまうことが往々にして るわけでもなくという……。 から引っ張ってきているもの 意味を彼に尋ねてみた。 そせ『towing voyage』。 やの ぎやかになっていく。 広がる風景を目の前にして、 く似合う。うすらぼんやりと 確実に在る『何か』を描く目に見えないけれど したくないと思って絵を描い る』という意味。自分の過去 「 <mark>『tow」 は 『</mark>引っ張る、 曳航す と、小さなかけらがちらほら つ視界の解像度を上げていく まずは呆然。そして、少しず 景は、雨かんむりの文字がよ サナギシンペイさんが描く風 少し困った表情を浮かべて 今回行われた個展のタイト 霞、靄、霧……。画家·ク

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中にいっぱいあって。すごく けれども、確実に今そこに在 いなと」 ことに興味があって。目に見 みたいなものとか。そういう わかりやすく言うと場の空気 るものって、意外とこの世の ることができない何か。 中にある景色、普段は目で見 なく、過去の思い出や記憶の そこに映るのは、自分が反転 を省みる「鏡」のような存在。 のではなく、絵を通して自分 喚起するスイッチになればい 絵を通して何か自分のメッセ が、そういった絵と人の間に を置くかでふわっと世界が開 えないけれど確かに在るもの した姿と背後にある世界では った人の中にある「気づき」を そうではなくて、絵の前に立 ージを発信したいかというと ような仕掛けをしています。 ある『見えない何か』が起こる 人によって違うと思うのです けたり、グッと内面に寄った た時に、その人がどこに視点 すべて平面作品である。 あるからだ。 「形がなくて目には見えない り。もちろん何が起きるかは ーがあります。絵と向き合っ モチーフと、何層ものレイヤ 「キャンバスにはたくさんの モチーフの意味をひもとく 今回展示された作品は11点、

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