

Hope for Post-war Contemporary Art in Japan: In Search of New Expressions

After World War II, Western philosophy and culture flooded into Japan.

Amid the ashes of the war, liberated from totalitarianism, the Japanese searched for new ways of life in Marxism, philosophy, *kabuki*, traditional performing arts, and fine art.

Born in 1933, Junzo Watanabe participated in social movements to search for his own way of life. However, he became fearful of people who acted in groups and chose the career of an artist, so he could live life as an individual.

This postwar experience predisposed him to work as a painter who always depicted humans as collective beings.

Watanabe had been exhibiting his work since he was a student at the Tokyo University of the Arts. His art style was characterized in a variety of ways: informalist, Macchiaioli, *matière* art, performance art, surrealist, mannerist, and expressionist. However, his style was uniquely his own, which did not belong to any category.

In 1969, Watanabe went to France under the Japanese Government Overseas Study Program for Artists provided by the Agency for Cultural Affairs. During the 10 years until 1981, he exhibited his paintings in Paris. With portraits painted in unique styles, such as *Metro*, his art style came into full bloom in those years.

Junzo Watanabe passed away in 2013 at the age of 79. His artwork is now being reviewed from a new perspective with the aim of re-evaluating his creative skills and originality.

As a leader of art in postwar Japan where people were looking for new talent, Watanabe became a ray of hope by creating an original style which did not belong to any art category in the world, leaving behind some unique footsteps.

What shall we call him?

For the moment, focusing on the profound inner nature of his artwork, we will call him an unprecedented new expressionist born from Japan.

We exhibit the works by this painter, who has not been evaluated by the world. We will show a representative piece from different periods of his life in order to demonstrate his originality. At the same time, we expect that this exhibition will provide an opportunity to evaluate his artwork in the context of the global art history.

Akira YOKOI(Owner, Shunpudo Gallery)