

Voices from Artist to the World

No.6

Masaaki Miyasako

Using a classical technique of coloring from the reverse side, called "urazaisiki," nihonga (Japanese-style painting) artist Masaaki Miyasako paints a picture with a contemporary taste. This year he is scheduled to have 2 solo exhibitions in national museums in Europe -- a challenge that started from Russia and Asian areas and is now developing into Europe. Miyasako's work, internationally regarded as contemporary art, stately proceeds to global stage of contemporary art scene.

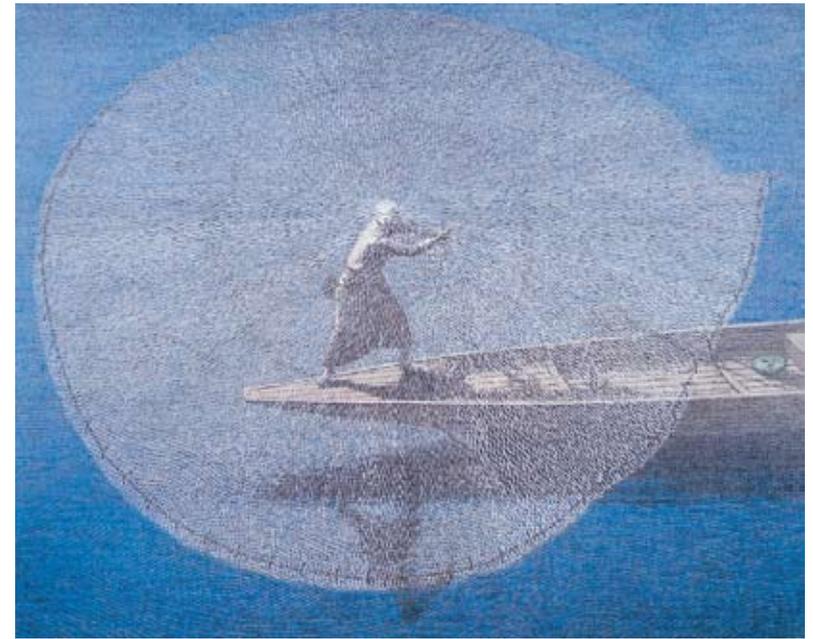
Like a kickoff ceremony before starting the exhibitions in Europe, he is to show a part of the exhibits at KaNAM (Karuzawa New Art Museum).



Introducing Nihonga to the World... Masaaki Miyasako's solo exhibition to travel to Europe

At present Masaaki Miyasako is widely active as a painter and a professor at graduate school of Tokyo National University of Arts. He has obtained several patents to develop new technologies for study on cultural property preservation, and made an effort as a general manager of the Japan-China joint production opera called "Kentoshi (Japanese envoy to China during the Tang Dynasty)." On the other hand, the artist works hard to support handicapped artists. Each of his multi activities, which seems to be supported by his excellent ability, is actually based in his firm belief that "we are able to contribute to the world through Japanese cultural power."

International presentation of Miyasako's work has been carried out under the great slogan "Introducing Nihonga to the World." His new expression, based on traditional technique, has enough content to be recognized as contemporary art, and is supported by a confidence that his art can show the way how contemporary art should take in the future. In such a strong belief, Miyasako starts his global activity with the background of Japanese cultures.



Eternal Moment 100F 2010

Introducing Nihonga to the World... Masaaki Miyasako's solo exhibition to travel to Europe

--We hear that your solo exhibitions in 2 art museums in Europe have been decided. I wonder if the plan has developed from the favorable reception of your work presented at national art museums in Leningrad and Moscow in 2010.

Miyasako (hereafter referred to as M): That's right. The offer of holding my solo exhibition has developed from the favorable recognition of my work presented in Russia and other areas.

--Where are your exhibitions to be held this year in Europe?

M: At Budapest History Museum, Hungary, from October 10 to November 10, and at Lisbon Museum of the Orient, Portugal, from November 20 to December 29. It seems that the national museums are both regarded as first-class there and are the equivalent of our Tokyo National Museum.

--I wonder if few Japanese painters get such an

offer directly from overseas national museums.

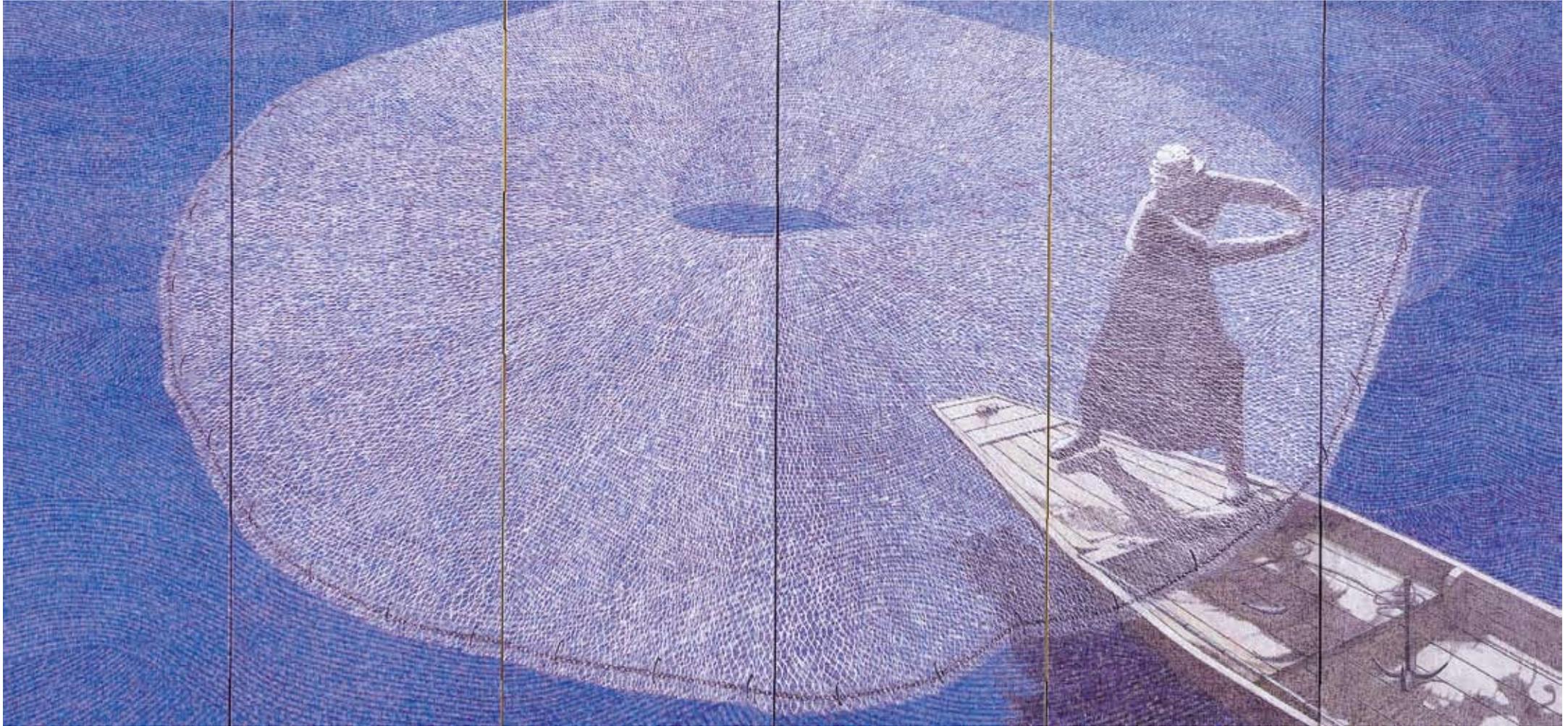
M: Probably so. It's rare for a Japanese painter.

--How many paintings are you going to show there?

M: I now plan to show 40 pieces or so in total, including 6 or 7 byobu (folding-screen) pieces and some 100 gou- (160cm X 100 ~ 130cm) or 50 gou-sized paintings and dessins.

--I think that the substantial number of byobu pieces will be the best part of the exhibition.

M: I hope so. I firstly wanted to exhibit 10 or so byobu pieces, but on my second thought, I thought it better to show more 100 gou- or 50 gou-sized paintings. The subjects will be the same as those I have tried up to today, and the exhibits are all to be recent ones. I'm going to show them with no picture frame. Byobu pieces originally need no picture frame, so they are, from the beginning, like contemporary art.



Water Firework, spiral (byōbu piece) 180.0cm x 360.0cm

--Isn't it that presenting nihonga paintings fair and square is an epoch-making affair?

M: In Japan, painting is categorized into abura-e (oil painting) and nihon-ga (Japanese-style painting) as if closing ourselves to global art scene. Such categorization is particular to Japan, and can never work in overseas. Internationally, art has been either categorized into fine art or contemporary art. I think that such categorization should also be applied to nihonga painting.

--You say that your nihonga painting is regarded as contemporary art there?

M: Yes. Overseas art scene clearly categorizes art in either way from the beginning -- a nihonga painting as fine art or a nihonga painting as contemporary art.

--What do you mean exactly when you say "contemporary"?

M: Whether or not an artist has an original technique and an idea, and whether or not an artwork contains a message and a philosophy -- I think these two matters are most important for being "contemporary." Some nihonga paintings have the both; others not when they are only a realistic copy of things. And, there are some artists who adopt an original way of depiction, not simply inheriting the same old traditional technique. In my case I use a technique called "urazaisiki" (coloring from the reverse side) of my own, which I believe works internationally as something original. "Urazaisiki" is backed by a classic technique, and is specialized as something new of my own by inheriting Japanese traditional nihonga painting, which I think must be, in a sense, something most contemporary. I believe that such contemporariness will take hold in overseas as a result in the future. You can say that Japan has always made a new departure while having its basis in tradition, which can be a guiding principle for world's contemporary art. I expect that art rooted in something firm, not art that is simply novel, will decide the future of contemporary art aiming at a new expression. Concerning my solo exhibition, I am truly grateful to the national

museums that have appreciated my work. So far, overseas art museums have not long paid attention to today's nihonga painting, but this time they have given me an offer of holding solo exhibition. Such an individual approach is greatly different from the stance of Japanese art museums: European museum curators see that some nihonga paintings of today can work there and they are each different.

--You mean that overseas art museums see an artist or an artwork as individual regardless of its category or genre.

M: That's right. National art museums there appreciate artwork on individual-piece basis, which is greatly different from the condition in Japan where appreciation has been done on category- or genre- basis, custom never seen in overseas.

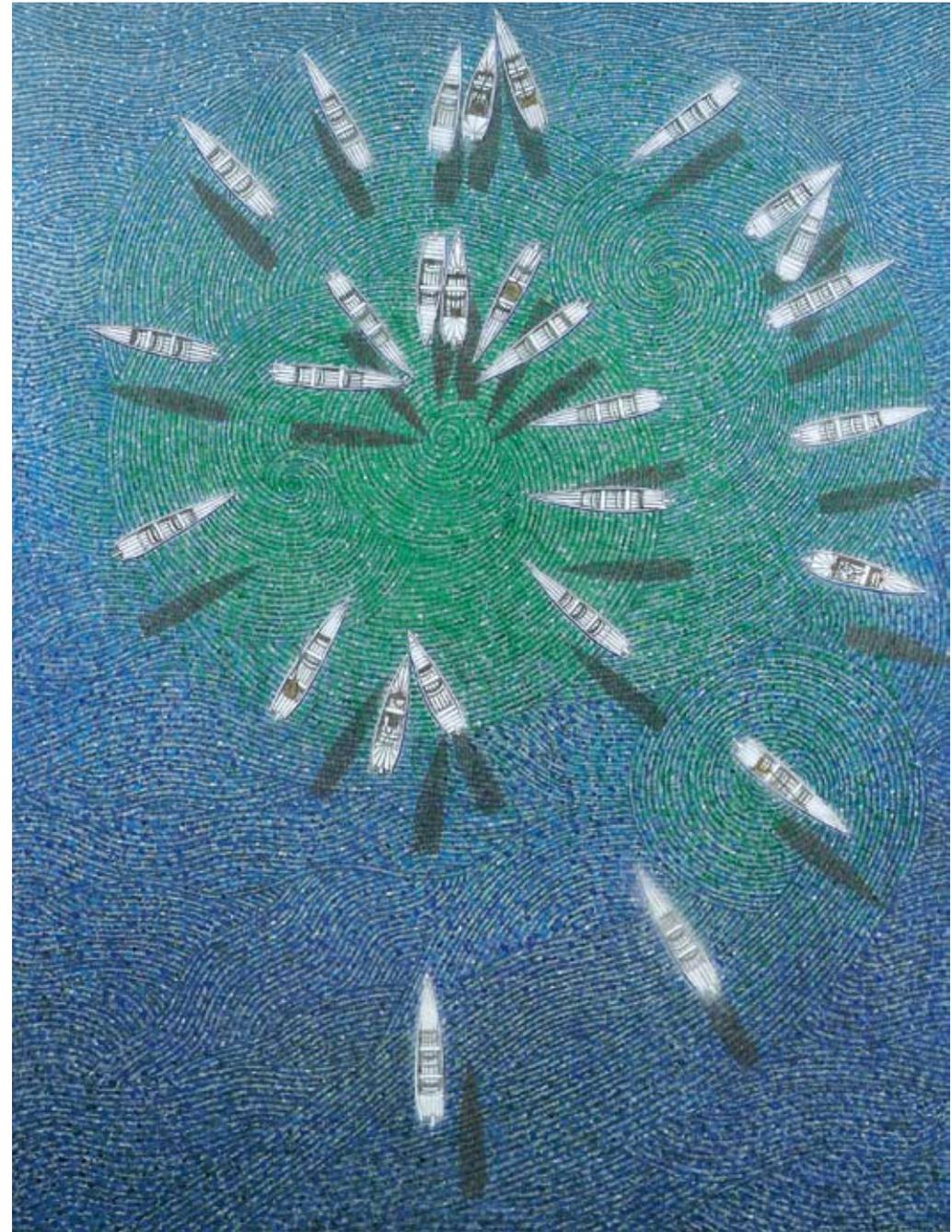
--Do you hope that your solo exhibitions of this time will lead not only to your personal recognition as an artist in art scene there, but also to more understanding of nihonga?

M: Yes. I have a very strong will to introduce excellent nihonga painting to the world -- nihonga painting that is excellent spiritually, not technically. It will be very important that nihonga must necessarily has philosophy as artistic message. Nihonga could never survive without philosophy.

--Could you tell concretely about "philosophy"?

M: In my case, philosophy is embodied into spiral form: origin of eternal life is composed of the spiral. But, I don't intend to draw the form itself -- the form is something that naturally appears while painting a picture. In a sense, spiral represents existence of life or universe, which makes me believe that I always have a universe within myself. I'm interested in the fact that a life called spiral can be found in every work of Ogata Korin, Ito Jakuchu, or Hayami Gyoshu, among famed painters in Japanese art history. We can be proud of this everywhere in the world, through which I believe Japanese artist will be able to find its way into world's art scene.

--So, you mean that from the very beginning,



Concerto 50F 2008

Japan has had something artistic that works everywhere in the world.

M: I could say yes or no, because Japan once took national isolation policy called "sakoku," but I think it very interesting that the isolated condition also fermented something inside the country, though most of things must have gone rotten. Only a few things, not going rotten, were successfully fermented and greatly changed, which resulted in "excellent drink." If we promote to the world the "excellent drink" produced after our long time isolation, we will be

able to create art or culture that will win overseas recognition.

--Are you aware of yourself being an artist leading the promotion?

M: Yes. I feel I must do it after all. The time has come when we should introduce to the world today's Japanese art, not limited to my work. I'm very conscious that somebody anyway has to take on the role. If we now voice today's Japanese art to the world, it will finally come back to Japan as more matured art. It's interesting that this also shows spiral.



《Narrow Victory》 2011年 120F



Rayu (byobu piece) 180.0cm x 360.0cm

--You're greatly hoping that more matured nihonga (lit., Japan painting) will become sekaiga (lit., world painting).

M: Yes. I have a wish to have solo exhibitions also in Wien or Firenze in the future, and extend my exhibition activities into national art museums in various countries, including America, which I hope will finally come back to Japan.

--We hope that you will develop your exhibition activities in overseas even more. Thank you very much for your time today when you are so busy.



Suite 100F 2012

Profile: Masaaki Miyasako

1951 born in Matsue city, Shimane
1979 graduated from Design faculty, Tokyo National University of Arts
1981 completed M.F.A. Nihonga Painting Conservation and Restoration, Tokyo National University of Arts (studied with Ikuo Hirayama)
1988 won Prominent Work Prize at Tokyo Central Art Museum Nihonga Grand-Prix Exhibition
1992 recommended for honor painter at Nihon Bijutsuin
1993 won Nihon Bijutsuin Prize (or Taikan Prize) at the 78th Inten Exhibition and Nihon Bijutsuin Scholarship Maeda Seison Prize.
1995 became associate professor in the course of Cultural Asset Conservation, Fine Art Studies, Tokyo National University of Arts, and recommended for membership in Nihon Bijutsuin
1999 won Minister of Education Prize at the 84th Inten Exhibition, had "Duet '99 Two-Person Exhibition: Abbas Kiarostami and Masaaki Miyasako" (Yayoi Gallery, Ginza, Tokyo)
2000 became professor in the course of Cultural Asset Conservation, Fine Art Studies, Tokyo National University of Arts
2001 had "Duet 2001 Two-Person Exhibition: Abbas Kiarostami and Masaaki Miyasako" (main branch of Tokyu Department, Shibuya, Tokyo)
2002 won Prime Minister Prize at the 87th Inten Exhibition (the work was purchased by the Agency for Cultural Affairs), and published a book of collected paintings "Mizuhanabi" (water firework) by Shogakukan
2005 participated in establishing Graduate School of Film and New Media, Tokyo National University of Arts, and took charge of stage design in the opera "Orpheus" (translation: Mori Ougai) at Sogakudo, Tokyo National University of Arts.
2008 solo exhibition at Russian Art Fair
2010 had solo exhibition at "Beauty of Japan," State Russian Museum, and participated in Russian Art Fair, Art Moscow
2011 took charge of art director and art design in the new opera "Kentoshi" at Sogakudo, Tokyo National University of Arts, and had solo exhibition at Art Taipei
2012 participated in "Wind of Karuizawa Japanese Contemporary Art 1950-2012," Karuizawa New Art Museum, and in Beijing Biennale

Solo or Group Exhibitions:

- * Art gallery at 7th floor of Tenmaya, Hachobori, Hiroshima, Jan.16 - 22
- * Four Solo Exhibitions by the artists who graduated from Design faculty, Tokyo National University of Arts, at Karuizawa New Art Museum, Feb.8 - Mar.31
- * Solo show at Budapest History Museum, Oct.10 - Nov.10
- * Solo show at Lisbon Museum of the Orient, Nov.20 - Dec. 29