

Voices from Artist to the World

No.8 Atsuko Onishi

Behind Onishi's decorative work are hidden various dramas. At the base of her work echoes human breathing itself.



Atsuko Onishi, who aggressively continues to have solo or group exhibitions every year here and there, has been recognized for her work interweaving in its decorative design her personal emotion, pictorial motif, air, or smell, most of which are based on her past memories. The charm of her work, featuring impressive vivid colors provided with her various thoughts, conveys to viewers warm human pulsation. In this interview, Onishi talks about her work with various episodes of her deceased farther.

--You seem to be very busy with solo exhibitions you have every year, and we hear that you work has already been recognized for some years at various international art fairs including Taiwan's.

O (hereafter referred to as O): I hear that dealers have steadily been introducing my work to international art fairs. Wherever people have a chance to see my work, I'd like to expand the chance, and I feel glad if I could send more messages to overseas art scene.

--Do you mean that you could shift your base of working to overseas?

O: At present I've only been working hard at every opportunity offered by art galleries, so, for now, I don't have a definite idea of shifting my working base to overseas. But, I've been

often told that my work isn't suitable for Japanese viewers and I should take my work to overseas because colors of my painting have a quite high chroma. I feel I'd like to do so if overseas viewers show much interest in my work in that sense. On the other hand, I won't be trying too hard for being active in overseas at any cost. Because Japan saw the years of the economic babble when I was a student and we students would easily travel abroad with the money we saved by doing a part-time job, we don't feel very much that there's much gap between Japan and overseas and that every artist could never be accepted without international activity.

--It seems that the idea of overseas has not been so special because we today can easily get



With a Wish 10F

There is her expression trying to put a life in the decorative design.

on the net various information of the world.

O: I think so. If possible I try to approach it through magazines or television or on the net. Especially I often try to get information from Europe because my work uses decorative elements.

--I wonder if, for that purpose, you're always putting out your extensive antenna to catch overseas or domestic information?.

O: Yes. For example, about colors or formal or decorative elements, I even in daily life unconsciously stock myself with the ideas of beautiful combinations of that color and this color or excellent combinations of that form and this form. So, when a solo exhibition based on a certain theme is decided, I think I can use my stock of those ideas to start to make sketches -- I don't simply draw flowers in vase based on what I see, but draw them interweaving there such elements as thought, form, air or smell at an moment, or anything

stocked in my memories.

--You mean that you don't simply copy a thing you see there, but draw a thing based on such elements you already have in yourself. Then, what do you think about the idea of abstraction or figuration?

O: Still lifes that I draw, though a flower, for example, is a real existence, are not depicted so figuratively. I mean that I interweave there unreal depiction of table cloth or flat vase. I think that in painting a picture, the contrastive condition of abstraction and figuration is very important. In my case, I rather introduce more elements of abstraction, not giving too much weight on figuration. As I said before, I wish to interweave on canvas impressive forms, air, or smell at a moment.

--And, your work is not named according to its motif, is it?

O: For example, I don't give a picture of narcissus simply a title "Narcissus."



Secret Present 10F

I try to look for words appropriate for the title, hoping that viewers will capture from it what I felt or expressed when I painted the picture. Seeing a picture and its title, some viewers would say that they also felt like that, or would ask me about when I felt like that. I'd tell them about some episodes behind the work, and they'd sympathize with me, saying that they had almost the same experience as mine. I'd feel glad to know that viewers felt that way about my work.

--There are various stories or episodes behind your work, aren't there.

O: Let me give you an example: a series of my works called "Secret Present" have some different patterns of design with a same title. To tell the truth, the series originates in my experience of losing my father three years ago. It's true that his sudden death was pretty hard on me, but I was once again made aware of existence of my farther. He'd always tell me since my childhood that I should acquire

some kind of skill or learn something nobody else but me can do. So, soon after his death, I strongly realized that my farther has left behind something like belief, not a thing, and wondered if I could put it into something like a work of art. My father's death was a sorrow, but I wished if I could keep what he left behind as a bright message, which led me to making "Secret Present." After all, my father left various messages with me -- acquiring a skill, advising me to take an examination for Geidai (Tokyo National University of Arts) while understanding the importance of trying the examination again and again making nothing of failures, or doing something that nobody else but me can do, all of which I realized were obviously presents from my farther to me. The presents figuratively expressed in "Secret Present" are each filled with memories of my farther, though viewers may not be aware of the stories behind them.

--So, the series is very important for you in many ways.

O: That's right. The work certainly means a turning point in my career.

--Could such turning-point series work greatly change your style of production?

O: As I'm always not satisfied with present condition of myself, I'm thinking I'd like to try expression of art as much as I can, but I don't think that extremely radical change of style seems to be suitable for me. So, before proceeding to next stage, I'll deepen further my present style till I'm satisfied with the result. Specifically speaking, though I think I'll try to add a change to texture and expressive manner of ground, I now don't want to change them too

much. I'm observing my present condition and a feel of my production before challenging next step or aim in the future.

--What do you think about your artistic development or vision in the future?

O: Japan saw a great change in Showa and Heisei periods about social environment or people's life style. Maybe owing to learning design, I usually think about various elements of design in people's daily life because a painting is usually hung in a living space at home. So, I'd like to keep up interest in how a painting comfortably or pleasantly blend into a life from a total viewpoint of designer.

--You work taking environmental elements into consideration, rather than simply making paintings to express your live emotion, don't you?

O: That's right. In connection with that, I think it important to appreciate present condition allowing me to express myself through drawing a picture, and recognize mutual relationship between viewers who accept my expression and myself, with which artists can manage their activities. I want to be an artist who always thinks much of such connection with people. I believe that a chance of holding exhibition allows artists to work hard for something new or new achievement and get a response or support from various viewers. This surely gives a great inspiration to artists. I think that the most important thing, especially for us female artists who will confront various affairs including marriage and childcare, is being continuously active as an artist living in this period. I want to stay painter who never gives up expression of art.



With Time 4F

Profile: Atsuko Onishi

- 1967 born in Ibaragi prefecture
 - 1992 Atsuko Onishi Print Exhibition, Kyubido Gallery, Ginza, Tokyo
 - 1995 Atsuko Onishi Print Exhibition, Gallery Uezumi, Kyobashi, Tokyo
 - 1996 Atsuko Onishi Print Exhibitions at Gallery GK, Ginza, Tokyo, and Art Space Nakatani, Ibaragi. completed M.F.A. design, Tokyo National University of Arts, and won Eiichi Ataka Prize
 - 1998 Atsuko Onishi Exhibition, Shirota Gallery, Ginza, Tokyo
 - 2001 Setagaya Art Museum Art University Instructor's Exhibition, Setagaya Art Museum, Tokyo
 - 2005 Atsuko Onishi Exhibition, Galleria Grafica, also in 2007
 - 2007 Atsuko Onishi Exhibition, Gallery ART G, Takasaki, Gunma
 - 2008 "Attractive World with Colors -- Atsuko Onishi Exhibition", Gallery Suiran, Maebashi, Gunma, and "Attractive World with Colors -- Atsuko Onishi Yoga Exhibition," Mitsukoshi Department Store Sendai, Miyagi
 - 2009 Atsuko Onishi Exhibition, Gallery Pier-One, Chiba and Gallery Sugi, Akita, and "To the Paradise of Creation -- Atsuko Onishi Exhibition," Gallery Suiran, Maebashi, Gunma
 - 2010 "To the Paradise of Creation with Colors -- Atsuko Onishi Yoga Exhibition," Mitsukoshi Department Store Sendai, Miyagi and Alpark Tenmaya Hiroshima
 - 2011 Atsuko Onishi Exhibition, Gallery Sugi, Akita, "Following Memories of Colors -- Atsuko Onishi Exhibition," Tenmaya Kurashiki, Okayama, and Atsuko Onishi Exhibition, Gallery Suiran, Maebashi, Gunma
 - 2012 "Harmony of Memories -- Works by Atsuko Onishi," Tobu Department Store, Funabashi, Chiba and Ikebukuro, Tokyo, and "To the Paradise of Creation with Colors -- Atsuko Onishi Yoga Exhibition," Mitsukoshi Department Store Sendai, Miyagi
- And had many other group exhibitions

Public Collections:

Kawatetsu Chiba Hospital, Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, Ltd., Meiji Milk Products Co. Ltd., and Kataoka Tsurutaru Art Museum