



The Blue Sky and the Earth/Sadness that Seeps into the Heart ( II ) 2013 Mixed media work

# Melody of the Firmament

## Journal of Koji Kinutani Tenku Art Museum

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### A museum museum taking on a new challenge

Hiroataka Sakamoto, Director of Museum Project Office

Six years have already elapsed since the Koji Kinutani Tenku Art Museum opened in December 2016 with its aim of being a truly unique museum. "World's first dive into pictures! Powerful 3-D image experience" has been the highlight of the museum since its opening. As Koji Kinutani says "the two actions of looking intently at a picture and of feeling movements like 3-D are both necessary", and it was a new challenge for the museum to truly be a place where one can undergo these two conflicting types of experience. Recently, digital art exhibits of the immersive experience type are attracting attention. Our museum has been working on measures for visitors to observe the artworks from both viewpoints; an immersive experience with 3-D image and further appreciating the pictures appearing in the 3-D images as well as three-dimensional artworks.

The biannual themed exhibitions and related innovative measures are only available at this Tenku Art Museum. It is our mission to proceed with both of these means of expression. The monthly held "Affresco Experience" is a workshop where participants can enjoy a rare experience of painting on a wall. The COVID-19 pandemic gave rise to our new "VR experience to connect with the painter" where the painter himself shows the visitors around the museum

and his atelier so that they can connect with Kinutani.

In 2021, the fifth year since its opening, the museum strode boldly onto its new stage when Koji Kinutani was awarded with the Order of Culture. The exhibitions focused on sending out the messages of Kinutani with greater intensity. Special exhibitions were held under the theme of "Affresco", the origin of Kinutani art, and "Funi-Homon", the source of creativity. As for a new measure, we have the annual "Children's Picture Competition" for children all over Japan to experience the joy and fun of creation, which we hope will provide opportunities to children of coming generations.

Last year saw two changes involving museums; the revision of Museum Act and the ICOM (International Council of Museums) approving a new museum definition. Museums need to go beyond the traditional framework, work on social issues and provide various experience opportunities. To this end, a series of talk session events on a particular theme will start in June, which is a learning place for working adults providing a venue for discussion from various aspects. It is my fervent wish that Koji Kinutani Tenku Art Museum will always keep trying something new and continue to grow.

# Description of works : Special Exhibition “Funi-Homon” ~ Wellspring of originality in Kinutani's art ~

“Monju Bosatsu Descends to Kurodani Konkai-Komyo-ji Temple”, “Deva King in the Sky (Tenku) – Katsu (I and II)”, “The Blue Sky and the Earth/Sadness that Seeps into the Heart (II)”

Akio Takahashi, Curator / Educator of Koji Kintani Tenku Art Museum



Monju Bosatsu Descends to Kurodani Konkai-Komyo-ji Temple 2022 Mixed media work

of the Kamakura era. Vimalakirti, a lay believer, preached that “the Buddha’s way is not to become a monk and be liberated alone in a secluded mountain monastery but, rather, to live among the people and to be liberated in the world”. Monju Bosatsu, a Bodhisattva charged with responsibility for wisdom, is depicted descending from the mountain after hearing that sermon. This passage in the Vimalakirti Sutra leads on to the climax of the sutra; that is, the crux of the dialogue between Vimalakirti and Monju Bosatsu: “Vimalakirti’s silence rumbles like thunder”. It shows the teaching of the way of viewing with both eyes and that spiritual awakening and secularity are not separate worlds. This piece precisely shows the true significance of Kinutani’s art. Incidentally, in 2019 Kinutani made “Light Descends on Kyoto” with the same design and motif. This was painted as the original picture for the official poster of the ICOM (International Council of Museums) General Conference in Kyoto 2019. The posters were displayed in the museums of 141 countries and regions in the world.

Next is “Deva King in the Sky (Tenku) – Katsu (I and II)” (I: 2020. II: 2021 mixed media 1940 x 1620, set of two). The two paintings are displayed together for the first time in this Special Exhibition. “I” on the right was painted in 2020 showing the city of Tokyo, while “II” on the left was painted in 2021 showing the cities of Nara and Osaka. The Deva Kings (Vajrapani), or the guardian deities, run through the scorching sky and confront the plague that is terrorizing the whole world. The Ungyo statue, with its mouth closed, smashes “Corona”, while the Agyo statue, open-mouthed, rebukes the virus. The Deva Kings hang a thread of salvation for the panic-stricken people; some lives were saved, others were lost. In these works, Kinutani projects the message that there is no such thing as an unchanging daily life, or an eternal life, and that even living and dying are not separate things under a crisis such as the recent COVID-19 pandemic.

The Funi-Homon (Dharma Gate of Non-Duality) is a teaching of the Vimalakirti Sutra, one of the early Mahayana Buddhism scriptures. It preaches the importance about a way of viewing things with both eyes, that two conflicting ideas are not two separate things; rather, they are related elements of a single concept. We create dichotomies of good and evil, gain and loss, or beauty and ugliness by which we judge numerous things. However it is nothing else but this dichotomous way of separating things that creates our worldly desires (things that trouble and torment our body and soul, such as obsession, desire, and anger). Our suffering is a direct result of such worldly desires. The world of Funi-Homon, where the dichotomous structure is dissolved and conflicting concepts are integrated, is preached in order to free ourselves from such suffering.

Raised in the ancient city of Nara, Koji Kinutani argues that “art has to be concerned with the very fertility of Nature which embraces everything about human beings, such as good and evil, beauty and ugliness, strength and weakness, and merit and demerit”, in which the philosophy of the Dharma Gate of Non-Duality is kept alive.

In the work description of this edition, we will explore the depth of Kinutani’s art which constantly enquires about the “wisdom for living” beyond fixed ideas through the three works on display for the first time, featured in the Special Exhibition “Funi-Homon” which opened last December.

First is “Monju Bosatsu Descends to Kurodani Konkai-Komyo-ji Temple” (2022 mixed media 1940 x 1120) appearing as the main visual motif in the flyers and posters of the Special Exhibition. This was created with the motif of the Monju Bosatsu statue enshrined in the Mie-do Hall of Kurodani Konkai-Komyo-ji Temple (Kyoto). This Monju Bosatsu statue is said to be one of the works of Unkei, a Buddhist statue sculptor of the Kei school who was active from the end of the Heian era to the beginning



Deva King in the Sky (Tenku) – Katsu (I and II) 1: 2020 II: 2021 Mixed media work

Finally, “The Blue Sky and the Earth/Sadness that Seeps into the Heart (II)” (2022 mixed media 2273 x 1818 shown on the cover). This is the sequel to “Blue Sky, Great Earth: Sadness Fills the Heart”, displayed at the 89th Dokuritsu Exhibition (October 19 (Wed) – 31 (Mon), 2022, The National Art Center), lamenting the current world situation as well as presenting a strong message for peace. The atypical ancient wooden statue with an air of requiem and magic implies a sense of the vanity of life, in that everything will inevitably decay in the fullness of time. A mother and a child lying in the sand are painted behind it with a wooden figure snuggling up to them. Black smoke is rising from far beyond the red horizon into the clear blue sky with a machine gun wrapped in the national flag of Ukraine peeking out at the lower left. Based on a theme of war and peace, this work cries out the teaching of the Dharma Gate of Non-Duality as expressed in Kinutani’s words: “No matter how much we pray for peace and continue to declaim the justness of such prayer, there are people who adopt exactly the opposite way of thinking. War and peace are not two separate concepts but, rather, two parts of the same whole. Hence, it is critical that we only talk about peace after capturing the whole picture through both eyes”.

Koji Kinutani is a prolific painter. He paints with diverse motifs, regardless of Eastern or Western influence, and selects from a wide variety of themes. He also makes use of a great number of expressive methods such as painting, three-dimensional, and images. It is hard to believe that a single painter can manage to accomplish so much. On the other hand, the philosophy or the message he puts in his works always remains the same. It is no doubt difficult to explain it in a single word, but Funi-Homon is one of the important components which makes up the foundation.

Needless to say, such profound knowledge is rooted from his formative years in the ancient city of Nara where Buddhist philosophy is ever-present. Since his youth, he has been closely familiar with its historical environment including the temples of Kofuku-ji and Todai-ji. However, I feel his knowledge derives from the wide perspective he has developed throughout his life. Looking at the worlds of Western and Japanese art, from classical art to modern art, he does not stay within a single category but finds interest in all things, visible and invisible. He tours the world with a sketchbook in his hand to develop a practical “wisdom” through his actual experience, which results in his philosophical outlook. Therefore, the simple and plain message he repeatedly delivers gives us the impression that it exudes truth and practical philosophy which has been discerned gradually through his lifetime instead of momentary emotion or thoughts. That is why I consider Funi-Homon to be the “creative wellspring” of Kinutani art.

In the work which I introduced at the beginning, “Monju Bosatsu Descends to Kurodani Konkai-Komyo-ji Temple”, the words “Form is nothing but emptiness, and emptiness is nothing more than form” written in it. This is a passage from the Heart Sutra, with the meaning that “visible and tangible things and intangible and invisible things are not separate but are the same in their essence”. This message has an unequivocal point for people like us who have to live in today’s complex world while trying to make sense of not only events happening in front of us but also people’s feelings hidden there. Please let me repeat that Kinutani is generously delivering the “wisdom” he has been constantly acquiring throughout his life with his art works.

I think it is quite meaningful and a real luxury to be able to appreciate the artworks filled with the “wisdom” of the artist. We can confront the philosophy of Funi-Homon and deeply absorb a piece of Kinutani’s philosophy of life through appreciating his artworks, as if reading his biography. As a person who is involved with a museum, I believe it is a very important role of mine to convey the knowledge and messages of artists to visitors. Such things cannot be adequately achieved with simple textbook learning. In the future, I would like to enhance the *raison d’être* of the museum by conveying the profound philosophy of Kinutani.

\* Believed to have been written in the first or second century AD, the Vimalakirti Sutra is one of the scriptures of early Mahayana Buddhism, and is said to have been brought to Japan during the Asuka era. Together with the Saddharma Pundarika Sutra and the Srimaladevi Simhanada Sutra, the Vimalakirti Sutra is introduced in the Sangyo Gisho (Annotated Commentaries on the Three Sutras), which is believed to have been compiled by Prince Shotoku. In contrast to the numerous scriptures in which teachings are given by Shakyamuni, the Vimalakirti Sutra is characterized by the fact that a lay believer, Vimalakirti, is the preacher. The Funi-Homon (Dharma Gate of Non-Duality) is an important idea that appears in Chapter 9, “Advayadharmamukhapravesaparivarta (Nyu-Funi-Homon-hon: Entering the Dharma Gate of Non-Duality),” of the Vimalakirti Sutra, teaches the importance of viewing things with both eyes in order to understand their essence as mentioned above.

# The Second Koji Kinutani Tenku Art Museum Children's Picture Competition

## Outline of the Competition

Koji Kinutani Tenku Art Museum held the Second Koji Kinutani Tenku Art Museum Children's Picture Competition following the first one of the previous year. This has put in place a mainstay of the museum, for children all over Japan to experience the joy and fun of creation. It is also a part of the cultural promotion business of Sekisui House, which is our management organization, whose fundamental philosophy claims "love of humanity". The entry period was from December 1, 2022, to January 30, 2023 under the theme of "My dream, my favorite time". Entries numbered 1,796 in total from all over Japan.

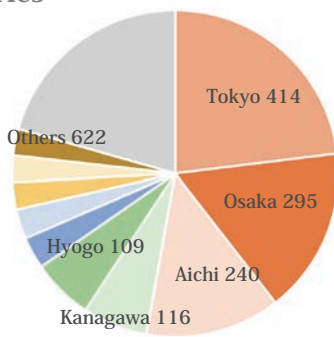
Focusing on the message from each child, 1 Grand Prize, 3 Excellent Prizes by Section (Elementary School Lower Grades, Elementary School Upper Grades, and Junior High School), 1 Museum Director Prize, 43 Honorable Mention Prizes, and 67 Winning Prizes, a total of 115 prizes were selected from the pictures of all kinds of uniqueness in the rigorous screening. 11 groups were awarded with a Group Prize which is planned to become the official prize from the third competition, as a Surprise Prize.



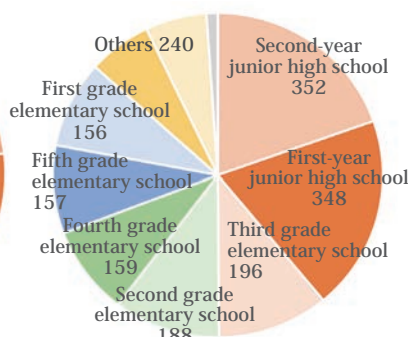
Group photo at the award ceremony. Center left is Mr. Yosuke Horiuchi, Museum Director, Center right is Mr. Koji Kinutani, Honorary Director.

## Outline of the entries

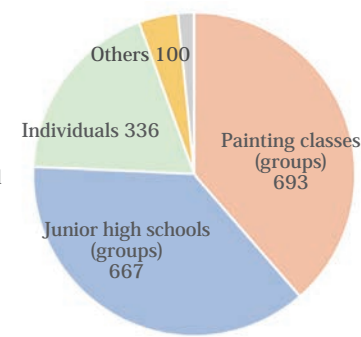
First, the entry breakdown per prefecture shows Tokyo ranked top with 414 entries, followed by Osaka prefecture with 295, Aichi prefecture with 240, and finally Kanagawa prefecture with 116. In the first competition, there were 961 entries from Osaka prefecture, 422 from Aichi prefecture, 260 from Kanagawa prefecture, and 255 from Tokyo, showing a noticeable 70% decrease from Osaka prefecture and an approx. 60% increase from Tokyo.



Breakdown per prefecture



Breakdown per grade



Breakdown per individual/group

Next, the breakdown per grade shows an increase from junior high school students, in particular from first-year and second-year students, totaling approx. 40% of all entries (approx. 30% last time). There was a change in the entry period (last time: from January 4 to March 31, this time: from December 1 to January 30), bringing apprehension of a scheduling conflict with the Center Test. However, there were 112 entries from junior high school third-year students (70 last year), resulting in a 60% increase.

As for individual and group entries, 693 from private painting classes/schools, 667 from junior high schools and 336 individuals. All the categories showed a decrease compared with those of last time, in particular a approx. 53% decrease from private painting classes/schools, which may be a future issue.

## Concluding the competition



Display (Winning Prize pictures, at the workshop space)

Compared with the outstanding first competition which coincided with the news of Mr. Koji Kinutani, Museum Honorary Director, being awarded with the Order of Culture, and due to the shorter entry period, this second competition attracted fewer entries in total number, however, there were even more excellent pictures, and the overall quality was strikingly high. It was particularly impressive to find a lot of pictures depicting dream and favorite messages in an honest and careful manner, as is shown in the Grand Prize-winning work of "In front of a Ladder Truck" by Shunsei Asai. We can feel the passion that the children put into their work, and all the pictures evoke images of children joyfully absorbed in painting.

These award winning pictures are on display at Koji Kinutani Tenku Art Museum from March 18 to May 31 titled "Excellent Work Exhibition". We invite you to come and enjoy the world rich in colors and images to experience the unlimited possibility of children of the coming generations.



Display (Prize-winning pictures, at the exhibition place, Tenku Gallery)

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