

Sohiro

SUICIDE SNEAKERS COLLECTOR
[series]

LOST HOME

DEATH IS TRUE

September 11th, 2021

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Foreword

I'm announcing that I have published 2 works, LOST HOME and DEATH IS TRUE from the series of SUICIDE SNEAKERS COLLECTOR.

I started working on these works with a concept: "The end of American capitalism and Japan" about 3 years ago. Just before the publication, the COVID-19 pandemic happened and I had been losing timing for it. For better or for worse, I again had a chance to realize the difference between the values of the West and Japan and it has given conviction in many ways to this series which unintentionally expresses that. However, there were bad effects, including the financial issues, the delay of various things and especially the difficulty of exhibitions. It means the guarantee of security for visitors and the meaning of holding them for the limited number of people even if we could have them. It's a matter of life and death for individual artists and we have been obviously facing this kind of change.

While seeking various possibilities one by one to move on, I came up with the conclusion that with the current situation, it's best to release my work in a non-physical space. The main subject is my own website and work as the press release is streamed there so that it can be made available to the public.

As there are currently some new words such as Post-COVID and New Normal, perhaps it might be getting more common for individual artists to publish their work with a non-physical space first to lose various burdens. I expect that exclusive platforms or web media for it will be created to make them public.

Lastly, I would like to thank a photography critic, Manabu Torihara who contributed the text this time. I truly appreciate him, who gladly accepted my request even though we have never worked together before, and his great effort for my complex work which is both a media, photography and contemporary art at the same time and mixed with series, a concept and themes.

Sohiro

Allegory

SUICIDE SNEAKERS COLLECTOR

– The End of American Capitalism and Japan –

The Essence of Capitalism Is “Collection”.

“Noah was the first Collector.” John Elsner and Roger Cardinal.(1994). *The Cultures of Collecting*.

The Protestant Reformation in the 16th Century

“Occupation is sacred!” “Wealth is a gift from God!” “I accept the 5% interest!”

A Protestant religious leader, Jean Calvin changed the rules. However, in the 12th century, the monetized economy was already ravaged and although the interest was extremely high, there were banks. Which came first, the chicken or the egg? Even though we are no longer sure if it's for repairing chaos or due to the pressure from the bourgeoisie, this is the birth of capitalism.

The land discovered during the adventures of the Age of Exploration became economic zones and eventually turned into a territory acquisition.

Colonial domination, the slave trade, the Industrial Revolution, money, people: “slaves” and land, collecting after collecting, even a continent was collected and the United States was born.

“Collection” is a Western Ideology.

According to the author of *Museum no Shisou*, Hideharu Matsumiya, a collection which is a kind of pathological phenomenon converts abnormality into normality by making it a social system. It is a concept that hides danger, that tries to own the world, such as desire, domination, invasion, conquest and so on. Furthermore, it is a Western ideology that is trying to integrate the entire world into the Western system.

“The Legacy of Tragedy” American Capitalism Is Collecting

It's been 250 years since the foundation of the United States. Behind a history of creating the bright culture or entertainment and collecting longing and respect from the world, as if it's in proportion to it, it has collected the legacy of tragedy which is bloody black. The slaves, discrimination, wars, nuclei, terrorism, gap, poverty, environmental destruction, guns, crimes, drugs...

“Imperialism” eventually changed to “Globalism” and it will erode the world like a contagious disease, expand consumption as a pleasure and willing to slave Homogeneity: “totalitarianism”.

“The End of American Capitalism - Death -”

The outward collection that lasts since the Age of Exploration is ending. After the establishment of mass production by Fordism and the consumer society of the general public in the early 20th century, as of the 21st century, “the bright future” like in SF or *Anime* hasn't come. The Emerging countries: “frontier” was ruined and inequality and gap widened as a result of belief in neoliberalism in which morality had fallen out.

The COVID-19 crisis and BLM issues have occurred in an introverted world.

It highlighted the deeply rooted discrimination in the West, the moral decline of egoists, the justification of their own righteousness and the world and us who were revealed our upbringing. Now, when it comes the time to change, where is a new way for us...

From Death to Life, the Road to Regeneration...

It's at least 300 to 500 years old. That is the age of capitalism. It is abnormal to be required a “development” at this age and exactly a living corpse. Is this what “destrudo” Freud said? Capitalism also ends at its death.

What is the West?

What have the intellectual giants of Economics overlooked?

Isn't a source neglected in the deepness of the essence of capitalism?

A theory started from believing in “one thing” is ending upon its death by following destrudo or breaking the curse.

To Regeneration

While it was falling from the top, the fire of a candle illuminating the darkness was extinguished. But the small gleam rising from the east will gradually keep rising.

What did the collectors see in their eyes?

Perhaps the way to regenerate might start from Japan, an intangible asset, leaving sneakers...

LOST HOME

Sohiro

2021

Series: SUICIDE SNEAKERS COLLECTOR

Sneakers: NIKE AIR JORDAN 1 HIGH BLACK RED

Series No. 1

Size: Print 49.1 × 69.5cm (Margin 59.4 × 84.1cm)

Medium: Digital C-Type Print (Lambda)

Edition: 1/1

NFT: 1/1



DEATH IS TRUE

Sohiro

2021

Series: SUICIDE SNEAKERS COLLECTOR

Sneakers: NIKE AIR FORCE 1 LEATHER & MESH HIGH

Series No. 2

Size: Print 49.1 × 69.5cm (Margin 59.4 × 84.1cm)

Medium: Digital C-Type Print (Lambda)

Edition: 1/1

NFT: 1/1



Just what is it that makes today's Japanese culture so different, so attractive?

Manabu Torihara | Photography Critic

An Art Movement of the Consumption Culture

Simulationism started in the latter half of the 1970s is a major trend in modern art. It's an attempt to create new works by borrowing, diverting or imitating the well known images and methods of advertising, journalism and works of art circulating in the society. It is an expressive form of the high consumption society where overflowing of visual images, which is perfectly encoded, has been constantly stimulating our desire and has become to control its psychology. By reproducing the pressure, which the visual media give the society and the individuals, according to the most typical expression style in the media, it tries to show a grotesque desire underlying the superficial images. It's photography that these artists chose as their main method. For example, Cindy Sherman, who re-acts the stereotyped description of women, Robert Mapplethorpe, who exposed sexuality, which was taboo, by borrowing the Western classic art style, Richard Prince, who re-takes advertisement and makes a copy out of it, Thomas Demand who stimulates déjà vu by depicting architectures or interior with cardboard based on the photographs published with media. They are also popular in Japan. While this trend is called constructed photography in Japan after its constructive method, it's also often called staged photography due to the similarity to a method of making advertisement photographs. The origin of simulationism can be seen in art movements in the 1950s, such as Neo-Dada or Pop Art. Speaking of the latter, even though Andy Warhol from the U.S. is instantly imagined, it actually started in the UK. As it can be seen in this typical work of the early days, Richard Hamilton. *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?* (1956)., in which an advertisement of goods of an American company was made collage, it showed how much the American rich consumer society affected the world. That Pop Art flew back to the U.S. and a superstar, Andy Warhol was born. He, who turned into an artist from an advertisement graphic designer, dismantled the only and real criterion of art by focusing on the duplication of the photographs used in advertising or journalism. What print work of re-taking the photographs of celebrities or accident scenes expresses is that it's a fact that we love superficial images showing purity emphasized with photographs more than individuals with complicated personalities. And the more it's copied, the more valuable it becomes. The work of Andy Warhol has had an influence on not only artists, but also pure photographers. Because the straight photographs representing their snapshots also imply the fact that it's one of the forms of simulation of this world. This is remarkably demonstrated by the works of Garry Winogrand, Lee Friedlander and Daido Moriyama. Daido Moriyama said "*A photograph is a copy.*" in the 1970s and it's one of the practices to eagerly publish the works of shooting signboards and television screens.

The Connection through “Nationalizing”

It was in the middle of the 1980s, when the work of Simulationism began to be actively developed in Japan and it was a little later than in America. There was a difference from that of America. A view of the qualitative value is highlighted while a matter of quantity of images is being a background. It is an expression of the complicated feeling of the Japanese for whom accepting the Western culture has meant modernization. In the art world, there is a fundamental anxiety at the bottom if we have actually digested an imported concept, Art which was translated as *bijutsu* in the beginning of the Meiji period. It could be said that trials and errors to connect *bijutsu* and Art have been making a history of contemporary art in Japan. It can be seen how much they felt conflicted during their journey by Hiroshi Sugimoto and Yasumasa Morimura who are assessed by leading Japanese simulationism. Hiroshi Sugimoto rediscovered various essences of Japanese antiques by living in the U.S. for a long time and re-illuminated their longing for Orientalism by Western people by taking them in his own work. It functioned there and was reimported to Japan. On the other hand, Yasumasa Morimura chose a method of getting himself into the masterpieces to express the depressed Western art and it was evaluated in the Western art world. Although their intention even seems to be passive, in terms of what they are trying to keep their identity as Japanese, they are common. It appears in terms of using a technique of *mitate*, the Japanese metaphor originated from Japanese tea ceremony, as an important method. It's interesting that Sugimoto particularly grasps Readymades from Marcel Duchamp as the same expression of spirit as *mitate*. It doesn't make much sense to think if this is an appropriate understanding for *mitate* or not. As there is a possibility of misreading, a movement spreads all over the world and various expressions are born. There is a possibility of duplication art such as photographs, movies, scripts and scores because their width of expression is widened by misreading. In other words, globalization and localization are cultural phenomena which always occur in parallel. The movement re-interpreting the essence of contemporary art and replacing it with Japanese unique one was more remarkable in modern art after the 1990s. The typical example is a movement, SUPERFLAT Takashi Murakami proposed. A description method of not using perspective and having a lot of blank space on a screen was what connected the manners of anime and Japanese art. The fact that Takashi Murakami has found out how to bridge the gap between Art and *bijutsu* is the generational fate and above all else, *manga* and *anime* are also Japanese acceptances of the overseas culture, comic and animation, and its localization. A writer, Mari Akasaka analyzed and likened an artistic trend like this called Neo Japonism to “Nationalizing” in the Heian period in a catalogue of an exhibition, “Bubbles / Debris: Art of the Heisei Period 1989-2019” in 2020.

*“This (*SUPERFLAT) is the conscious or unconscious separation from the Western European Centrism since the Meiji period that we were hardly instilled in by education and so on.”* (168). (*added by the author)

The current Japanese identity, which was built by infinitely going back and forth between the West and Japan and repeatedly being twisted, has been sought in art in a self-referential way like this.

The Sneakers and Mt. Fuji

The basic intention of “SUICIDE SNEAKERS COLLECTOR” series by Sohiro is the separation from the Western educational principle, in other words, an approach to Nationalizing. As per the title, this work describes the views of the suicides and the main motif is sneakers. As the main motifs of these 2 works, “LOSTHOME” and “DEATH IS TRUE”, the red AIR JORDAN 1 NIKE for former and blue AIR FORCE 1 for latter are used and Mt. Fuji is captured in the background. In LOSTHOME, the red sneakers are left lining up on a rooftop of a building from where Mt. Fuji can be viewed and under the sneakers there is a suicide note from which it can be guessed that who committed suicide is probably a man. In DEATH IS TRUE, a close-up of legs wearing the blue sneakers, who seems to have committed suicide in a winter withered meadow spreading in the foot of the mountain, is taken. Judging from what she's wearing and belongings scattered on the ground, it is probably a woman. A key to finding out what caused their suicide is these special sneakers chosen as “burial clothes” and the author used them to resemble the symbols of American capitalism. Needless to say, sneakers are fashion accessories from the U.S.. According to a book from a sociologist, Yuniya Kawamura. *Sneaker Bunka-Ron*. Japan: Nikkei Business Publications, Inc., it became popular overnight due to a jogging boom in the 1970s. Around the same time, the free agent system for professional sports like basketball started and the sneaker brands improved their brand images by signing a contract with star players. AIR JORDAN NIKE was a symbol of it. Furthermore, as it became a must-have of their fashion for rappers including Run-D.M.C., it gave them a boost in popularity. However, on the other hand, an image of the underground was hanging because both basketball and Rap are the world that Blacks lead and formed. Here I re-quote the words, which were

quoted in this text, by a black cultural researcher, Michael Eric Dyson. “*Sneakers are also the real symbol of the historical Rap culture and underground drug economy. They implicitly express what is cool, hip and chic from black culture.*” (133).

Moreover, it was given a new meaning after the 1990s by Bill Gates or Steve Jobs willingly wearing them. Sneakers have experienced each hierarchy of the subcultures and become the unique symbol which represents the advanced American culture. A lot of Japanese collectors wear them with such a casual image they have. It can be said that it's a common mentality with art lovers' who have no interest in cultural conflicts between them while accepting *bijutsu* = Art. They all are the typical Japanese who grew up honestly following the sense of tendency which was given by education and advertising expressions. Japanese simulationism is a new attempt to escape from this point and close a gap. However, we can find it not easy by seeing the works of the preceding artists. Not only the latest tendency that constantly flows from the Western art scene, but also the return to “Nationalizing” is also becoming a persona, mask, which is easily detachable. If so, the heroes and heroines from SUICIDE SNEAKERS COLLECTOR might have killed themselves by realizing this and deeply despairing. Looking at Mt. Fuji in the background and thinking of that reminds me of a famous scene of Sanshiro by Soseki Natsume. It's a scene where the main character, Sanshiro, who is going to Tokyo from Kumamoto to enter Tokyo Imperial University, meets a university professor, Mr. Hirota on a train to Tokyo and has a short conversation with him. He said that “*We are each pathetic.*” to Sanshiro saying “*Western people are beautiful.*” He continued that although we won The Russo-Japanese War, we only have Mt. Fuji to be proud of in our country and “*it's not even what we made.*”. Sanshiro opposed this and expressed his hope that Japan will develop from now. But he just said, “*It will perish.*”. He concluded that “*You can't get caught up with. Even though you favor Japan to wish like that, it is just going to spoil it.*”. Mt. Fuji, as a symbol of Nationalizing, looks down on Japanese people having complexes and conflicts toward the new thoughts or images of trends constantly rushing from the West. “SUICIDE SNEAKERS COLLECTOR” is a work that resembled the Japanese depression, which was caused by being caught in a dilemma between Western culture and Nationalizing since the Meiji period, in a very modern and directed way.

August 23rd, 2021

Statement

Artist Statement

9/11 was the beginning of me as an artist. I was 25 years old and living in Japan. It was the first moment in my life when I felt that this is a real war by seeing that shocking scene on TV. 2 months later I made a social art with a concept to connect smiles with art against a feeling of loss or despair caused by this tragedy. This is the beginning of me as an artist and also one of the most important elements of what I have been making until today.

Although it may be just a coincidence that I was born on July 4th, exactly 200 years after the Declaration of Independence, whenever I think of 9/11, it feels as if I'm thinking of what happened in my own country. Thinking about why the tragedy like this happened and comparing it with Japan have led to thinking about politics, the social issues, the way people view religion, morals, aesthetics and other various values.

Although people from other countries might not understand, a lot of Japanese people go to the Shintoism shrines on New Year's day, have a Buddhist monk at a funeral and even celebrate Christmas. This is what Japan is. We have a culture to save the tradition, accept and mix others and avoid conflicts at the same time.

It works just because we have our original Japanese values. They are what began from mythology or the Jomon era and DNA, the geographical environment, various thoughts or how people view religion made culture and a lot of things piled up above the history.

I just want to express this “ordinary Japan” with my own work, not by praising or forcing it. This is how I found my answer, “updates on Japanese aesthetics”. I understood it as a mission first and it has already become a vocation. I am thinking that setting updates on Japanese aesthetics as the core values of the creation would help it transcend the era and remain.

This is a motivation for my work and what makes the core of it.

About The Work

In this series of works, the expression of *MITATE* is the most important element and they are created to admire it. Although it might sound kind of creepy to anthropomorphize the Declaration of Independence and admire who has committed suicide, I would like you to enjoy *mitate* as a method.

Mitate is a kind of metaphorical expression to replace something with different expressions. Although other metaphorical expressions need a connection to a context to work, *mitate* does not necessarily concern it. It is a concept which is so wide-ranging and tolerant that even pretend play of children or similarity of symbols work.

The method of *mitate* can be found in various Japanese traditional things such as Zen garden or *karesansui*, *haiku*, *waka*, *kabuki*, *ukiyo-e* and even the oldest history book, *Kojiki* or the oldest anthology of poems, *Manyo-Shu* existing since the 7th or 8th century.

So, *mitate* is one of the aesthetics developed in an original Japanese way and the aesthetic value that both the creators and receivers including people who admire it and all of the Japanese people have in their mind. Updating Japanese aesthetics including *mitate* is my obligation and even though the media was different, it's always and unintentionally been the essential value of them since my early works.

As I mentioned, I use various arts media and do not specify any of them. This time, there is a big concept which is an allegory I wrote and I decided to use photography as the media so that people could see the visions imagined from that with more realistic.

An allegory has a structure such as metaphor, anthropomorphism or lessons. In this allegory, the structure consists of various elements such as 9/11, discrimination, metaphor, symbols, *ukiyo-e*, Zen and so on and they are all making a story called an “allegory”.

To admire *mitate* I mentioned at the beginning also means to read the story, the allegory by art.

The Day *Mitate* Becomes MITATE - As the Other Statement -

“*Mitate* is close to a concept, Simulacre which is spread by Jean Baudrillard. Because *Mitate* is always not real.”
- Masao Yamaguchi. *Masao Yamaguchi Chosaku-shu*, 5. Japan: Chikuma-Shobo.

Also, a cultural anthropologist, Masao Yamaguchi even came to a conclusion that “*mitate* could be a deconstruction in a Japanese way” by relating to its characteristic that is “separated from the original one and seeing from a distance” in an interview with an artist, Shuji Takashina from a book *Nihon no Bi wo Kataru*. Japan: Seidosha.

Moreover, Yamaguchi indicated its similarity to “Ostranenie”, a poetic language, as *mitate* has ambiguity in a linguistic perspective. Ostranenie is a concept proposed by Viktor Shklovsky who was a key person in the literary movement that happened in Russia in the early 20th century. It means “a method to express ordinary things as something strange”. With almost the same meaning, a German playwright, Bertolt Brecht also proposed Ostranenie (Alienation) as a theory of drama.

In addition, a linguist Kenji Tatsukawa is also trying to grasp *mitate* in “Semiotics”. Kenji Tatsukawa. *Ai no Gengo-Gaku*. Japan: Natsume-Shobo.

I wonder if *mitate*, one of the Japanese traditional aesthetics, would be an international word MITATE by connecting to the Western words such as Simulacre, deconstruction, Ostranenie or Semiotics which affected art history as well. Although these interpretations, indications and attempts are still slight, these lights are brightly shining in my eyes.

I set updates on Japanese aesthetics as the core values of my work.

As per the statement, I've been seeing updates of Japanese aesthetics as a vocation. Update has 2 meanings: work itself and connection to the art history whose criterion is the West.

However, the intention absolutely requires translation of aesthetics which is vague and complicated. It requires a high level translation that can explain understanding of the difference between metaphor and analogy, which deeply reflect culture, or *kanji*, ideographic that is iconic and has a lot of information.

It is not pessimistic because the research on Japanese aesthetics was done by our predecessors an eternity ago.

It's self-deprecating to keep the history: huge knowledge, documents and discussion only in Japan and each of these might be the reasons to keep Japan away from the West, the center of the world. Although in the Japanese art world, it's a well-known fact that an art critic, Noi Sawaragi likened Japan being far away in many ways from the center, the West to “a bad place”, it's also an obvious fact that it's each artist who is entrusted to consider what and how to connect Japan to the center as long as Japan is not there. It's not too late to see if this work with the core values of updates on Japanese aesthetics could connect with them before Japan becomes completely “isolated”.

Sohiro



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