

The Beginning of Questions About Art Objects Made by Mothers

OUCHI Kaoru (Curator of Tokyo Shibuya Koen-dori Gallery)

Here, I would like to focus on the place of this exhibition at Tokyo Shibuya Koen-dori Gallery and on sorting out points with several orientations regarding “Mom’s Art.”

Place at Tokyo Shibuya Koen-dori Gallery

Art brut is the genre that is the focus of art introduced at Tokyo Shibuya Koen-dori Gallery. This genre has accumulated decades of discussion in the West since it was translated as “outsider art” in the 1970s. Looking back on recent developments in Japan, however, we are in the middle of movements that have started to spread and establish this genre, first around 1990, and more recently since the 2010s, through exhibitions that were each symbolic in their own way. Thus, it can be said that art brut is a genre that, in Japan, is still not mature both in terms of being well-known and discussed¹.

Tokyo Shibuya Koen-dori Gallery had its grand opening in February 2020. Our mission is to contribute to diversity and coexistence through art by projecting a harmonious view of people and society for the next generation onto our programs. Art brut here is considered to be something that can fulfill the role of a new channel that captures the diversity of various artists (people) and expressions (creations) that have been overlooked, in no small numbers. It does so through the characteristic of paying attention to creativity and creations that are manifest regardless of any specialized art education. This exhibition was just such an attempt.

The beginning of this exhibition: Kyoichi Tsuzuki and the “counter” in “Mom’s Art”

This exhibition began with the gallery’s plan to collaborate with one of the exhibition’s curators, the writer, editor, and photographer Kyoichi Tsuzuki. From 1989 to 1991, Tsuzuki compiled volumes of outsider art in *Art Random*², a contemporary art anthology series that summarized trends in contemporary art around the world in the 1980s. The fact that Tsuzuki is a pioneer in introducing this genre in the category of contemporary art along with its artists and works is a major reason that we wanted to collaborate with him, and we also expected to capture this genre from a new angle with Tsuzuki’s distinctive perspective³. In the styles of Tsuzuki’s series of work, it is possible to read an approach that would be counter media in modern and contemporary art systems. It exposes the highs and lows in art rankings and the ins and outs in the power structure by looking at the charm in the low and the outside. It makes us realize that the low and the outside, which are made invisible by mainstream media, are actually the majority of society. The theme of “Mom’s Art” was set in the early planning for the exhibition. This, too, is something that Tsuzuki has devoted interest to for about 10 years now while thinking about “majority culture.” “Mom’s Art” was spontaneously named in the visualization of “things made by (my) mother” that emerged on the Internet in the early 2000s. It can be said that thinking that captures a “counter” culture with the face of the things, people, emotions, and their “everyday” in the lives of the majority was to be found in Mom’s Art as well as underlying this exhibition, which has renewed interest on the many art objects seen in Mom’s Art⁴.

Association “crazy about SHITAMACHI-RETRO” and the existence of women plus a community case study

Next, I want to consider the point that intensity was added to this exhibition through participation as a curator, through the introduction of Tsuzuki, by the association “crazy about SHITAMACHI-RETRO,” which is based in Hyogo Ward, Kobe, and co-represented by Yuki Ito and Kaori Yamashita. Through activities such as local tours to reexamine home-grown culture, in the 2000s the association met women in their 70s and 80s who had continued to create artworks in domestic spaces, centered on women who were once

leaders in handicraft activities at women's associations in Hyogo Ward. The association has continued to communicate with those women ever since. As an association, it has shown a high level of aggressive interest in them, creating its own definition of "Mom's Art," publishing books at its own expense, and holding Mom's Art exhibitions, but it has not focused on a "counter" to existing art systems and contests by deviating sharply. Rather, the association's perspective is to focus on the activities that reveal the existence and independence, from an intimate point of view, of elderly women in the community who are their real-life friends and acquaintances, women who create artworks in the home, given their social and historical context. It could be said that an ongoing case study in the theme of art related to a more existential and radical change in mentality has started here.

The beginning of questions about art objects created by mothers

The Japanese title of this exhibition, *Nippon Koku Okan Art Mura*, is inspired by *Nippon Koku Furuyashikimura* (A Japanese Village: Furuyashikimura⁵), directed by Shinsuke Ogawa, a leading documentary filmmaker of the 1960-80s. The film released in 1982 approaches the details of people, nature, and history in its depiction of daily life in matter-of-fact manner in Furuyashiki Village, a depopulated rural community in Yamagata Prefecture.

On the other hand, it is also a record of love and nostalgia for *things that will disappear* in the future. As the times change, the stereotyped perception of gender roles is fading, but this historical backdrop may be an aspect that supported Mom's Art⁶. By complete contrast, our society is lacking in both emotional space and spare time. Through this exhibition, we were asked to consider the future of craftsmanship as seen through the "mothers" and how it can be captured in the future, in such a society. Perhaps the creation of new language has started in order to render things that cannot be described only with "nostalgia."

1 Jean Dubuffet originated the term art brut in France in the 1940s, and art historian Roger Cardinal translated it as "outsider art" in the UK in the 1970s. The fluidity of significance of this genre in the context of society and the times is often discussed. The 1990s movement in Japan included *Parallel Vision* exhibition was held at the Setagaya Art Museum in 1993, and exhibitions of outsider art were held continuously at The Ginza Space for 10 years from 1991. Movements in the 2010s include the triumphant return of the *Art Brut Japonais* exhibition (2010) held at Al Saint Pierre in Paris, France, which toured public museums in Japan (2011-13).

Since the 2010s, it can be said that art brut has come to be recognized as a genre in which many artists with "disabilities" play an active role, against the background of messages promoting diversity and coexistence among the people and values that make up society.

2 "Outsider art (Art random no.50) (Kyoto Shoin, 1989), "Outsider art II (Art random no.75)" (Kyoto Shoin, 1991), edited by Kyoichi Tsuzuki.

3 Since the 2010s, it can be said that art brut has come to be recognized as a genre in which many artists with "disabilities" play an active role, against the background of messages promoting diversity and coexistence among the people and values that make up society. This exhibition was also envisioned as an opportunity to reconsider the broader interest in this genre that emerged in the 1990s.

4 This style has produced representative works such as *Tokyo Style*. Tsuzuki's essays and photographs, based on his original reporting, attempt to capture the life-size "happiness" of individual "majorities," minorities in society, in a positive light rather than depicting "social minorities."

5 *Nippon koku Furuyashikimura* directed by Shinsuke Ogawa (Ogawa Production, 1982)

6 Research is advancing to view post-modern Japanese "handicrafts" from a gender perspective, such as *Gendai Shugei Kou: Monozukuri no imi wo toinaosu (Contemporary Handicrafts: Reconsidering the Meaning of Manufacturing)*, edited by UEBA Yoko and YAMASAKI Akiko (Film Art, 2020)