

Making Side by Side

Yesterday I went to WHARF in Wakabacho for the first time in a while, and spoke to Makoto SATO¹ who happened to be there. In the middle of the large space a single row of narrow tables, with a row of chairs just down one side—“side by side” I thought.

For last year’s Koganecho Bazaar I wrote a long concept text, but due to the situation, the exhibition didn’t go according to plan. As a result, instead of having an exhibition that had been created according to a theme and changing the usual local landscape, it felt more as though the real nature of Koganecho was introduced, and I think this in itself was a good thing.

Recently I have feeling that in all my concepts I end up talking about art and community, and I was thinking about how I would like to get away from this for Koganecho Bazaar 2021. It was around this time that I visited WHARF, and these words—SIDE BY SIDE—popped into my head.

Of course, there is a famous song by this title. For my generation it was sung by Chiemi Eri. Originally written during dark times, it is a song about living together brightly in hope, despite the darkness.

I looked up a range of definitions and examples of “side by side” on my computer. In doing so, I found that it had both the objective meaning of being next to each other, but also a more subjective meaning of collaboration and doing things together.

If possible I would like to begin this time with the objective meaning. Those who have been to Koganecho before will be aware of the innumerable doors and windows lined up around the area—a result of its history. Some of these doors and windows open at times, but others remain closed. You can generally guess by looking from the outside which of these are being used by artists.

My current idea is of an exhibition that reflects the landscape of the area, whether it’s through windows, doors, inside or outside. I’d like to create a sense gradual change as you walk down the street. I think there are a number of ways this could be done, with artworks of different sizes, serial works, different ways of dispersing the works, but this is the overall scene I would like to set. As such, I would like this Bazaar to have a lot of works, with as many artists as possible involved. If you look at one artwork, the others also come into focus. It would be nice if we could create an atmosphere in which even the things that are not artworks come into focus.

I would like to make one more sidenote. In around 2013 I began researching YOKOI Shonan². His work was brought to a halt when he was assassinated. However there were others who carried on his work, who tried after the Meiji period to create an almost parallel world, a Japan that was different from what had been before. What did Asian modernity mean? Is it possible for us to find these people who grasped it, who had different ideas, in order for us to re-capture the history of modern art in Asia? These words are but a simple preface, but I would like to research and think about this in more detail, along with the people who will be working with me.

All the various countries of Asia have pointed to their own ideas for their potential futures. When young artists and researchers face the issues that are in front of us now, those past ideas cease to be part of the past, and are resurrected before us.

Then we can all see one another as an opportunity to renew ourselves.

For all those artists who aren’t so familiar with Koganecho, please take a look at the photographs on the homepage.

If possible, we will be inviting researchers and interns to take part this year as well.
Let us all continue do our best until we can meet again.

Shingo Yamano, March 2021

¹ Playwright and director. Born in Tokyo, 1943. Founded the Underground Theatre Jiyu-gekijo (Freedom Theatre) in 1966, and participated in Theatre Centre 68 (now Black Tent Theatre) in 1968. In addition to directing a wide range of performances, he continues to discuss and explore the boundaries between theatre and society. He has been involved in the opening and running of public theatres for many years, serving as the first theatre director of Setagaya Public Theatre (1997-2002) and as the first artistic director of ZA-KOENJI Public Theatre in Sugunami as of 2009. Engaged in the development of the next generation, in recent years he has been working with independent Chinese theatres with the aim of forming an alternative network of Asian theatres. In June 2017, he established WAKABACHO WHARF, an art centre in Yokohama, which is attracting attention both as a creative base and as a space for cultural exchange between young Asian (including Japanese) theatre makers.

² Confucian scholar, political thinker and Samurai of Kumamoto at the end of the Edo period. Around 1843 he opened a private school, and advocated *Jitsugaku* [Neo-Confucian practical thinking]. In 1858 he was invited by the Fukui *daimyo* [feudal lord], Yoshinaga Matsudaira (Shungaku), as a political advisor, and led the feudal reform of Fukui, which he wrote about in *Kokuze Sanron* [The Three Major Problems of State Policy]. In 1862, on the appointment of Shungaku Matsudaira as the new *seiji sosaishoku* [shogunal prime minister], he became involved in the Shogunate government. He supported Shogunate reform and the *kobu gattai undo* [movement for union of Imperial Court and Shogunate], aiming to establish “public” politics as a new path for the nation. He was made senior counsellor in the new Meiji government, but was assassinated in Kyoto in 1869.