

Difference is requisite for communication according to Gombrich. It implies that communicating will not occur if there is no difference.

In other words, a certain distance should be there to have a dialogue. Conversation without distance or without a sense of distance belongs to an area of personal muttering or autistic talking. An artist's expressions should be essentially a dialogue, because the artist is the first privileged audience. There is no creation except one that gives a chance for appreciation. It is, at the same time, not guaranteed that an artist will be the last viewer, because once a work of art is finished, it will start living its own life.

Miyamori Keiko is not in Japan while I am writing this. She won the Tamon Award in 1995 and now resides in New York City. I look forward to seeing how her experience of living there will be reflected in her future work. At the moment, I am listening to myself typing on the keyboard, acknowledging a distance between artist Miyamori Keiko and myself, and realizing that a dialogue is about to begin between us. She entered University of Tsukuba, where I am teaching, and studied Japanese painting at the School of Art and Design. She completed her master's courses and is now working at a studio as a researcher. Therefore, it is difficult to adjust to the distance between us.

Despite this subtleness of distance, I became aware of recognizing her as an artist. Let me begin there.

In September, 1994, she held a solo exhibition entitled "Denial of Denial," a small but substantial show at Annex Hall of University of Tsukuba. There were photo panels entitled "Friend's Wall" in the "731 Series." The photographs are of a ruin of the No.731 military unit which was based in Harbin. In her letter to me (dated November 1, 1995), she says, "When I was standing in front of the crumbled walls of a boiler room and a freezer at the ruins, pieces of knowledge disappeared in silence, and consciousness went deep inside myself."

The text of the pamphlet she prepared for the exhibition was a youngster's straightforward confession of shaken feelings before the historical facts.

"As I created the 731 Series, I couldn't escape from a danger that 'being concerned with social problems' would be changed into arrogant hypocrisy or vulgar curiosity. Dealing with 'historical facts' as a 'material' of expression would be an insult to the spirits of many people who were hurt by the historical facts."

Miyamori Keiko reproduced the walls of Harbin—the wall about which she had a "dialogue" with a Chinese young man. Members of the audience were allowed to write (or rather carve) letters freely with their nails. We might have been requested to do so. Why does Miyamori Keiko urge such violent cooperation or tortuous conspiracy?

Because the Chinese man wrote "friend," Miyamori almost lost an outlet of expression. As the title "Denial of Denial" suggests, it seemed to drive her as an artist into a never-ending labyrinth of self-denial. It was through this self denial that she could go back to the world of expression.

I do not remember talking about Asia with her, but I will never talk about Asia without mentioning this incident. It has no common ground with an Asia fad in arts which has an ambiguous historical view for easy consumption. These questions are not temporary, but essential for the future of communication—to ask where the basis is and how we can construct the basis.

I talked with Miyamori on the currently exhibited work when I met her on our way to a parking lot. I also had a glimpse of her creation process. What had weighed on my mind for a while was the part which became "gate" in the end. In Miyamori's notes on the creation process, there is a passage, "I had an image of a gate since the stage of drawing

esquisses."

"Gate" is completely different from a picture frame. A picture frame cuts out a work from the surrounding space. The existence of a frame is weak from the beginning. Gate, on the other hand, is more of an intense presence than a frame, and even gives up its original function of a frame at the bottom of the picture.

Miyamori seemed to be well aware of this. In her letter, she writes that a gate is a concrete object along with a bird. She explains further as follows: "A gate exists for people to pass through. Here the substantial space is sealed by a picture. Passing through it requires the power of human consciousness. A concept of gate is a human creation. It is also human perception whether to consider it a limited and closed entity or as a space to connect different worlds."

Thus a gate becomes a threshold. People walk over this threshold in order to live.

Following the above explanation of a gate and regarding the exhibition, Miyamori places "bird" as a surpassing existence of "gate."

"In 'Portrait III,' I tried to embody miserable but tough people who are oppressed by time and space and restricted by the fore-mentioned concept. A bird has capabilities which human beings do not have. This ability suggests to me a possibility or hope. "Flying" freely connects the two worlds transcending the concept of "gate." Based on this idea, "bird" and "growing gate" were created. I wanted a false gate in the picture to be transformed spiritually into a true gate."

Actually, however, Miyamori herself is not sure whether this gate can be passed through or if it should be passed through (maybe a person should stay inside). She further explains: "I also live in a giant gate, and the outline of this gate will become vague in the surrounding space. However, for now, I will stick to my life while being aware of all the limits and in-betweens in the world."

Thus, for Miyamori, the motif of a gate is connected to life. In her previous works, she used to interchange white and black. She "had to take life positively" because "once there was a sense of life in a monochrome world, the picture started to produce an organic icon."

If the "wall" embodied the historical depth which could not be passed through either physically or spiritually, Miyamori discovered a pathway at the "gate" along with a "bird" (hope) in order to pass through it. She says, "The human inside me longed for life, and it has shown me an inevitable direction of human consciousness."

I am not a prophet and so will not predict Miyamori's future. However, if she proceeds or is guided in this inevitable direction, she will not lose the public's trust as a creator.

