



Keiko Miyamori

Surfaces of Time

- The Collected Surfaces of Time and Space -



Imagine - Here and There (transformed) 2020  
Child beds, flowerpot, charcoal, washi, wire, flower petals  
(Installation) Approx. 250 × 160 × 70cm / 8.2 x 5.3 x 2.3 ft.

## Keiko Miyamori: Surfaces of Time

Shinya Koizumi, Art Critic

### A Maze Inside the Tower (Dungeon)

I posted the following comment on Facebook:

*I went to Keiko Miyamori's exhibition being held at Gallery Toki-no-Wasuremono, and recorded a talk with her. I have written down matters I was unable to mention in our discussion:*

**My notes: Rose petals are scattered beneath the staircase → above are two floating beds (which are vertically flipped) → with rose petals blanketing those beds → up the stairs is an astronomical telescope to view the beds → the paper in a typewriter nearby reads "rose" → a drawing close by has multiple surfaces that sway as one walks by → up ahead is a birdhouse hanging in midair → below the skylight above is a roofless bird's cage.**

*Miyamori's installation harmonizes well with the architectural space of the gallery, with the space in its entirety pervaded with the image of an ascending current.*

*It is an outstanding installation that allows one to keenly sense the existence of a spirit that penetrates the past (not here) and the future (to come).*

*This installation is not only based on the artist's own experience, but it also takes the viewers deep into their own past memories.*

A friend responded to the above post, saying, "Your comment reminded me of a puzzle-solving escape-game." This gave me a clue to Miyamori's exhibition; namely, it has an aspect that is rather like feeling one's way through a maze in the dark.

I initially began by writing the notes quoted above in an attempt to capture Miyamori's installation through overlapping Rudolf Steiner's (that means, Goethe's) view on plants with Brancusi's work *Bird in Space*. The diagram in Fig. 1 explains the biodynamic idea of making wine from organically grown grapes. The basic principle of this study is for one to imagine a plant in its entirety, from the roots to the flower/fruit, via the four states of matter: minerals correlate to roots; water relates to leaves; light relates to flowers; heat affects fruit. This exact same order applies to Brancusi's sculptures. This is not a coincidence, nor is it about Brancusi's inclination toward mysticism. Rather, it should be understood as the manifestation of his will to create his work via gazing upon the fundamental principles that support this world.

Is it not true that artists tend to seek out the essence of the world from an accessible place, rather than to take a broad view from high above? From this perspective, the "puzzle-solving escape-game" description my friend gave (that is, Miyamori's installation is like the experience of following a maze in the dark) is an excellent comment on contemporary art. At the same

time, the image of life ascending in a spiral and the element of darkness that I perceived from her exhibition led me to envisage the sight of Taro Okamoto's *Tree of Life* that was installed inside *Tower of the Sun*.

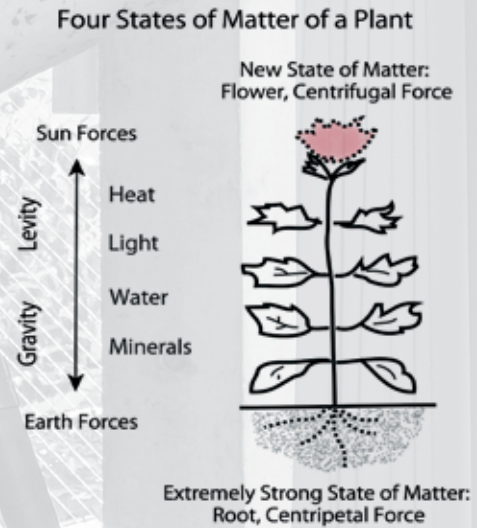


Fig. 1 \*

\* Reference: Nicolas Joly (translated into Japanese by Yoshio Ito), *Wine from Sky to Earth*, Asuka Shuppan-sha, 2004.

Around the time Expo '70 was held in Osaka, I, as a high school student, thought that *Tower of the Sun* was a hideous object that eulogized the high economic growth in Japan at the time. I did not have a good impression of Okamoto back then, partly due to his overly-dramatic television whiskey commercial. But one of the reasons the National Museum of Ethnology in Japan was established is because of the mask collection that was exhibited in the basement of *Tower of the Sun*. When I learned that the collection was executed due to Okamoto's recommendation (he had formally studied ethnology under Marcel Mauss in France), my impression of him was reversed. *Tree of Life* was a device for the visitors to experience the evolution of life, from microorganisms to human beings, as they walked up the spiral stairs. Much later in time, I was impelled to reconsider the meaning behind *Tree of Life*. That is to say, in the basement and on the interior of Okamoto's monument for that modern festival were tribal masks (fetishes to exorcise evil spirits) and the history of life that began from ameba-like, indefinite forms of life. These ideas led me to realize that *Tower of the Sun* was an attempt to create a balance in society through adopting the primitive power of life, as opposed to the Expo, which was heavily inclined toward praising modern civilization.

### Modernist Architecture and Life

As is well known, Gallery Toki-no-Wasuremono, which used to be a private residence, was designed by architect Tsutomu Abe. In the midst of writing this essay on the very first installation ever to be held at this venue, I heard the news that the former Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura was designated as an Important Cultural Property of Japan. This museum was designed by Junzo Sakakura, who was also Abe's mentor. The



Hallway connects the lower level and upper level of the gallery



Globe 4110 2007  
 Globe, washi, charcoal  
 37 (diameter) x 91 (h) cm / 14 ½ (diameter) x 36 (h) in.



Reindeer horn 2018  
 Reindeer horn, washi, charcoal  
 89 x 51 x 29 cm / 35 x 20 x 11 ½ in.

reason it was bestowed that designation is as follows:

The indoor and outdoor [of the museum] are fluidly connected, owing to the smooth circulation plan... It has realized an open, rich spatial atmosphere through developing a compositional design utilizing elements such as windows and staircases.

Surprisingly, this description completely overlaps with Abe's masterpiece, his famous residence "House with a Center" (Abe House). Viewing the floor plan of this residence makes one feel certain that the Abe House is a homage to the former Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura. The balance of both of these buildings is maintained through "compositional design." That is to say, because of the design, the museum could maintain the balance between the closed aspect of protecting works on exhibit and the open aspect of enlivening the visitors. And the design of the Abe House maintains the balance between the open aspect of daytime and the closed aspect of nighttime.

One can easily imagine that the initial human habitation that arose at the time the idea of architecture had first appeared was an indefinite-shaped cave that barely protected life. But when a structure was built for a supernatural being such as a god, a cave probably took on a format that transcended one fit for a human life. If we were to understand Modernist architecture to be the result of an effort to readjust that format of a habitation fit for a god to one suitable for humans, then it would explain the sense of comfort one can perceive from the buildings designed by Sakakura, as well as those designed by his mentor Le Corbusier. The reason why Abe has exclusively designed private residences might be because he has sought out a more humane form of Modernist architecture.

The building that was reincarnated from a private residence to a gallery must have lost the human warmth it used to have during nighttime. Into that space, Miyamori's installation once again brought a breath of life. The rose petals that are scattered in several places inside the gallery symbolize indefinite forms of lives that do not fit into any specific frame. The rose petals are first found at the entranceway (visitors can directly feel the architecture with their feet when they change into slippers), and then they blanket the vertically-flipped two beds, which are suspended from the vaulted ceiling above the entrance. The bed on top implies the present, and the one below, the past, which as a whole conveys a sense of presence of the children who had once lived there. Those beddings of literal rose-petals fill the space with a sense of transient seduction.

As if to look back at the vaulted-ceiling space, an astronomical telescope is installed in the second-floor corridor, in a way in which one can peer at the flower petals on the beds. I interpret this telescope as being a device that converts a remote distance into a distant period of time. I would feel dizzy if that time would go back several dozen light-years ago, but it allowed me instead to instantly recall a scene from several-dozen years ago, when I was seven. The "light" that was etched into my memory beyond that distant time still kindles in my mind today. In a typewriter placed near

the telescope is a piece of paper on which is typed the word "rose." But when one reads the keys that are not covered with washi paper, starting from the upper to lower keys, it says "EROS." One might question whether this approach is connected with Marcel Duchamp's puns with double meanings. But instead of being overly inquisitive, one should simply concentrate on the image of the rose petals that are slowly losing their "light" and colors before one's eyes and let it merge with the image of their appearances before they had fallen. One should then imagine the lives ("EROS") of the roses ("rose") that will continue to exist within the limited visible distance seen through the astronomical telescope, but which can also be perceived as existing within an eternal sense of time.

When one walks between the telescope and the typewriter, the pieces of custom-made washi paper slightly sway across the surface of a large-scale work, which is exhibited on the wall. The drawing that is found under the layers of washi appears to be changing its expression in response to the viewer's movements. Thus, the viewer ends up applying his/her own feelings in accordance with those changes. This means that an interactive expression is possible without the use of any information technology. Visitors to a temple used to feel the spiritual power of Buddha from the vivid chisel marks on the natabori (lit. hatchet-carved) statue. Similar to this, the resonance between two minds or spirits via an artwork primarily manifests itself in a mystical feeling that could only be conveyed through such an analog means.

As one steps further into the space, while also connecting with the diverse objects shown along the corridor, one sees a birdhouse in midair. Going up to the third floor guided by that box, one finds a roofless birdcage placed below the dome-shaped skylight on the ceiling. The birdcage, wide open in the space bathing in light, is not a symbol of absence. Rather, this sight should be understood as representing the time after the bird in Brancusi's *Bird in Space* had completed its mission to carry a spirit to heaven.

The gallery space with Abe's Modernist vaulted-ceiling has regained a sense of life as a place where the phases of life pass through, shifting in such a way as happens with the flower and the wind and the light of Miyamori's installation.

### Surfaces of Time

Perhaps the most apt way to relate to Miyamori's series of works *Surfaces of Time* is to refer to the diagram in Fig. 2, which appears in Henri Bergson's famous book *Matter and Memory*. Bergson elucidated that the totality of the past, indicated in a cone shape [the cone of memory], is condensed into "point S," which touches "plane P," the plane of the present moment. "Point S," seen as countless "objects," composes the "plane" of our present. And each one of those "objects" with their own condensed memories takes on a role in the cone of the past. Bergson examines the internal activities he refers to as "memory-images," and defines "matter" to be an aggregate of images that involve the physical body. A work of art can be referred to as an object that has externalized an image via the physical body.

Literary critic Norihiro Kato is said to have once pointed out a commonality between the works of Miyamori and photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto. According to Kato, what they share in common is the anonymity of images, which has the strength to directly function to draw out personal memories of the viewers.

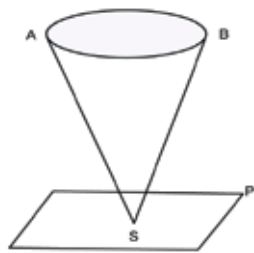


Fig. 2 The cone of memory

In her frottage series, which reproduces the surface of tree bark onto washi paper, Miyamori aims to embed the “point” of the present, where the past of the tree and that of Miyamori interact. Thus, her aim does not lie in the outpouring of the unconscious, as was the aim of the Surrealists. If we were to refer to the said Bergsonian diagram, the past of the tree and that of Miyamori (seen as two cones) would face one another on the two sides of the washi paper. This might remind one of a known diagram by Albert Einstein, which perfectly conforms with that image of two cones facing one another. That is to say, that image overlaps with how the past and the future pierces through the “light cone” (Fig. 3), which was elucidated by Einstein in his theory of relativity.

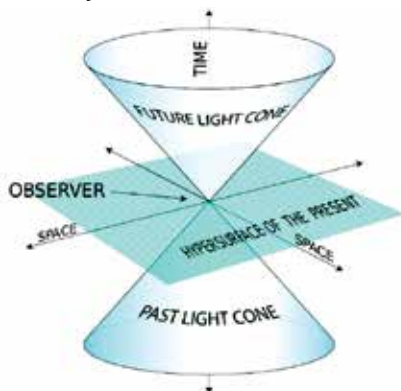


Fig. 3 Light cone

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Light\\_cone](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Light_cone)

In Hiroshi Sugimoto’s photographic work *Seascape*, the “point” lies between the sea and the sky, while in Miyamori’s work, the “point” is seen as the traces of where she came in contact with the tree. Both of these expressions derived from the artists’ perceptions of the past, which resulted from their condensing the dimension of time in a three-dimensional space, before then condensing those pasts once again into two-dimensional works. Miyamori furthermore pastes her frottages on an object, and shows her work in a three-dimensional form. Hence, what manifests before the viewer’s eyes is a maze-like image in which three past cones are intertwined: the past cone of the object, that of the tree from which the frottages were created, and the past cone of Miyamori herself. And by overlapping the viewer’s own past cone to those three, he/she will end up viewing the respective four futures through the work in a kaleidoscopic manner.

The first time I encountered Miyamori’s work was probably twenty years ago, at a group exhibition held at the Tsukuba Museum of Art, Ibaraki. The work I saw had a whitish, translucent plane, but what caught my interest was the strange flatness and the ambiguity of the theme. I could tell that she had put a considerable amount of work into it, but the images that emerged on the surface hardly took on any specific forms. Wanting to know the reason behind her strange expression, I conducted interviews with Miyamori on such occasions as her introduction as a new artist in an art magazine, or when I selected her for the Vision of Contemporary Art (VOCA) annual competition. In those interviews, I recall having that same strange feeling as when I viewed her work, as I listened to her talk about her thoughts on sickness and wounds that she had ingrained in her works.

In 2000, Miyamori shifted her artistic activity to the U.S. Thus, it was not until about five years ago that I was able to view her works again. On that occasion, I was quite surprised to see her frottages done on washi paper, which manifested a sense of lightness and freedom that was removed from the traditional framework of painting. The central object of that exhibit, which was clad in frottages on washi paper, which manifested a sense of lightness and freedom that was removed from the traditional framework of painting. The central object of that exhibit, which was clad in frottages on washi paper, is along the same line as her current works. However, the tree-like structure that was installed in the central area of the gallery space was created from long pieces of washi paper, which seemingly took root in the floor, while its branches also extended toward the ceiling. In retrospect, this work must have been associated with her installations held in the U.S., in which she used the entire root structure of a huge tree that was two meters in diameter, as well as with the dynamic form of her sculpture in which she suspended the huge root ball in resin. Miyamori has also developed an ongoing relational-art project, *Tsunagu Wall*. For this project, she adopts small, transparent cases into which she places brick fragments, which were originally held by the forementioned huge root ball. She then exchanges those cases with similar-sized objects donated by the visitors. She then creates a large-scale wall composed of transparent cases: within them, the brick fragments and the donated objects.

*Tsunagu Wall* can be seen as composing the sideway position of the light cone in Fig. 3. That is to say, the wall did not serve as a partition; rather, it acted as something like a bulletin board notifying viewers that the past and the future cones have intermingled. Thus, this project should also be referred to as “the surfaces of time.” The brick fragments, which derived from the root of the torn-down tree, have been carried into and have decorated people’s daily living spaces, as if they have turned into flowers or are emitting streaks of light. This is a wall that converts the past into the future—that is, the wall embeds the “lights” from the distant past in objects, and then delivers them to be “lights” to people in the future. This concept indeed represents the essential role in the medium of painting.

(Translated by Taeko Nanpei)



Birdcage Without Roof #4 2009  
Birdcage, resin, grain(quinoa), charcoal, washi  
30 x 21.5 x 35 cm / 11 ½ x 8 ½ x 13 ½ in.

## Just As Traces of Entrustment

Sayaka Osaki, Poet

You open the door. There is the entrance hall with no steps. The petals are scattered just behind shoes, what kind of petals are they —the petals in the color of shy lips— roses? When you look up, the hall continues to a wide open stairwell with two white beds for kids hanging alternately like folding on one another from the ceiling of the stairwell, and there are also roses on the beds... well, it may not be roses, but the petals are there, spread softly, and you feel that the petals smelled like the coldness of the limbs of a child who took a rest on that bed long time ago.

The lower of the two beds is hanging upside down, and there is an empty flower pot in the place where someone would lie. When you stand beneath, you will surely look up at the bottom of the pot.

Both beds and flower pots are vessels that receive decaying things. Keiko Miyamori has a naive sensitivity. Once she has been unable to draw "beautiful pictures" after she had accompanied a journey to follow the footsteps of Manchuria Unit 731. Once she got mentally ill in New York, where she had been invited with the award she received. Once she has loved picking up a "dead" tree branch in Philadelphia. She has sheltered a mass of tree roots that had planned to cut down for development, and scraped out the sediments held by the roots. I was listening to Ms. Miyamori's stories while remembering the word "vulnerable" which was used with a unique emphasis by the novelist Kenzaburo Oe.

A pattern comes up with charcoal on a piece of Washi paper as she puts it on the bark of the trees and traces. Sometimes dark, sometimes light. Results from the same act of tracing can be fine or messy and she accepts them as they are. She decided to call it "Jutaku\*" (tree rubbing)" as the method she found to heal herself

eventually became her lifework. Only by using this method, she could finally accept herself, the others and the world around her, which would soon be peeled off from each life like the bark of a tree.

In the wide corridor and the exhibition room at the top of the stairs, various items carefully wrapped in tree-rubbed Washi paper are arranged. The patterns somehow look like black blood stains or dirty snow, some with tranquil, others with ominous atmosphere. A bird cage without a roof, a shoe tree, and a reindeer horn. So that the act is for acceptance, they are also "the items that were there by chance at that time." We all exist in this world like them, as unrelated things, not being carefully selected. The space was bright with the light falling from the round skylight.

An idea came to me that Ms. Miyamori might be softening the impact of encountering the objects, keeping an appropriate distance from them, and protecting her vulnerable self by the act of wrapping. A typewriter is also wrapped only except four keystrokes R, O, S, and E (Ah, again, a rose...). "There was a person named Rose," Ms. Miyamori said. While trying to imagine the typist Rose, I mumbled Gertrude Stein's line; a rose is a rose is a rose.

Tree rubbing is equal to entrustment. We would be peeled off never knowing what we are entrusted with. Being allowed to look around only for a moment standing on the surface, we struggle to see what we want to see, or are upset to find what to see. That's okay. That's really fine. To tell herself and others, Ms. Miyamori keeps wrapping.

\* The Japanese word for tree rubbing "Jutaku 樹拓" has the same phonation as the other word 受託 meaning "entrustment."

This essay was originally written in Japanese for Toki-no-Wasuremono Blog: Essay by Sayaka Osaki "Jyutaku no Konseki toshite" (English translation is also by the author)



The objects covered with "Tree Rubbing on washi" in the exhibition "Surfaces of Time" 2020





Imagine Here and There (Transformed) View from the first floor 2020



Imagine Here and There (Transformed) The discolored flower petals at the end of the exhibition 2020





Transparent House with Emergency Water Reserve S1 2009  
 Glass, lead, wood, resin, washi, charcoal, shell powder  
 13.3 x 6 x 9 cm / 5 ¼ x 2 ½ x 3 ½ in.



Cassette tape "I want" 2/2 2018  
 Cassette tape, washi, charcoal  
 6.3 x 10.2 x 1.2 cm / 2 ½ x 4 x ½ in.



Fish hook 2015  
 Fishing hook, washi, charcoal  
 7 x 3.5 x 1 cm / 2 ¾ x 1 ⅜ x ⅜ in. (each)



Box\_ Maggi Beef Flavor Bouillon 2009  
 Used box, branch, washi, charcoal, acrylic paint, shell powder, gold leaf  
 10 x 5 x 1.5 cm / 4 x 2 x ⅝ in.



Baby Bottle #2 2009  
 Baby bottle, washi, charcoal  
 5.5 (diameter) x 14 cm / 2(diameter) x 5 ½ in.



Sandglass 4103 2005  
 Sandglass, washi, charcoal  
 10.5 x 3.5 x 3.5 cm / 1 ⅞ (diameter) x 4 ½ in.



Layers of Time: Pandemic NY #1 2020  
Wooden frame, washi, charcoal  
44 x 38.5 x 1.8 cm / 17  $\frac{3}{8}$  x 15  $\frac{1}{8}$  x  $\frac{3}{4}$  in.



Layers of Time: Pandemic NY #2 2019  
Wooden frame, washi, charcoal  
44.5 x 32.5 x 3 cm / 17  $\frac{1}{2}$  x 12  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 1 in.



Layers of Time: Komagome #1 2020  
Wooden frame, washi, charcoal  
22 x 17 x 4.5 cm / 8  $\frac{5}{8}$  x 6  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 1  $\frac{3}{4}$  in.



Layers of Time: Komagome #2 2020  
Wooden frame, washi, charcoal  
50 x 45 x 3 cm / 19  $\frac{5}{8}$  x 5  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 1  $\frac{1}{8}$  in.

I felt an urge to see something deeply beautiful, so I went to Gallery Toki-no-Wasuremono to see Keiko Miyamori's exhibition *Surfaces of Time*. Miyamori creates a *jyutaku* (a frottaged tree-bark pattern) piece via placing an extremely thin piece of gampi (washi) paper on a tree trunk and then tracing over the bark with charcoal.

No matter how multilayered the pieces of translucent, gauze-like gampi are, they have no sense of thickness, and no matter how many of them are gathered, they have no sense of weight. With the *jyutaku* pieces, which look as if they have been sprinkled with ink, she covers the walls and the two child's beds that are suspended from the ceiling. The beds are blanketed with pale-pink rose petals. The *jyutaku* pieces that are each partially glued on the walls and the picture frames dance with the slightest breeze, allowing the viewer to glimpse the curtains of memories. One might also feel that those pieces are like a protective film when they are tightly wrapped around a birdcage, globe, or tree branch.

In the same way as the growth rings of a tree, *jyutaku* also reveals the period of time that the tree has lived through. Her *jyutaku* pieces were produced from

trees in New York where the artist lives, and from trees in Rikugien Garden, located near the gallery. Hearing this touched me deeply, as I thought about the great distance of space on Earth that has inevitably been disconnected because of COVID-19.

The sense of subtleness that I perceived from Miyamori's delicate white, gray and rose colors led me to recall something in my memory. After some thought, I remembered having that same perception when I saw the Butoh dancer Kazuo Ohno in his latest years, wearing a white costume on his slender body and moving so subtly that it was difficult to refer to as a dance.

Another thing I remembered was the old, transparent, pale-pink, silk scarf that I have. I was told that it was dyed with cherry bark. I remember being amazed to learn that the pink of a cherry blossom was hidden in the brown bark. On the other hand, Miyamori's *jyutaku* pieces do not necessarily derive from a cherry tree; thus, they would not conceal any pale-pink. Nonetheless, the only apparent color found in her installation is the light tones of pink of the rose petals. In one of the exhibited works, the word "rose" is typed on the paper in an old typewriter covered with *jyutaku*. This word was also adopted as its title.

Tokiko Suzuki, Art Historian

(Translated by Taeko Nanpei)



Typewriter - Rose (Details)



"Keiko Miyamori - Surfaces of Time - Collected Surfaces of Time and Space" Exhibition Archives

Period: 2020.9.25 [Fri.] - 10.17. [Sat.]

Venue: Gallery Toki-no-Wasuremono (LAS CASAS 5-4-1 Honkomagome Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo, Japan 113-0021)

Related Event: 2020.9.24. [Thu.] Gallery Talk (without audience) Shinya Koizumi x Keiko Miyamori (Organized by Toki-no-Wasuremono)

Front Cover: Rewinding Time of Life (Detail) 2020 | Back Cover: Cane 2020 (Photos : Tatsuhiko Nakagawa)

Photo: p.2, p.4 (Bottom right and bottom left), p.7, pp. 10-11, p.13, p.14, p.15 by Tatsuhiko Nakagawa | p.4 (Top), p.8 (Top), p.9, p.12 by Tetsuya Shiono (Colla:J)

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