

Japanese artists bring light to underground art

by DONG YUE SU

The exuberant colour and delicate lines of Japanese art, blended with rough and explosive North American street art, will be the highlight of an upcoming show, *Hiraki*, at Ayden Gallery in downtown Vancouver from Sept. 12 to Oct. 12. The show will feature pop surrealist paintings by six Japanese-born artists, most of whom are extreme sports enthusiasts.

Taka Sudo, one of the artists and also the co-organizer of the show, has been living and working in the ski town of Whistler for more than 10 years. He is now in his mid-thirties and he participates in freestyle skiing contests. Ryuichi Ogino started his art career in San Francisco and based his art on his experience in the local snowboarding community. Yoshifumi Nomura is a break-dancer who used to make a living as a bike messenger in San Francisco. Another artist, Seitaku Aoyama, also lives in San Francisco. Teiji Hayama lives in Switzerland and Emi Kanomata has been living in Vancouver for the past four years. All of these artists come from a similar sub-cultural background.

"Together we want to bring this underground visual art to light."

Sudo explains the name of the show, HIKARI, literally translates as light, suggesting illumination.

As Sudo sees it, one of the commonalities among them is the use of opulent color to illuminate the so-called pop surrealist or low-brow art, an art movement born in 1970s Los Angeles with cultural roots in underground comics, punk music and other street art culture. In Sudo's painting *Feral*, he transferred newspaper print to a large square canvas and painted a delicate skull in the middle. He then applied printed text and color patterns. After that, he sprayed bright yellow and saturated orange color and used a black marker to create movements reminiscent of graffiti text.

The outcome is a rebellious gesture of graffiti, normally seen on street walls, now hanging in a clean and well-lit gallery. The contrast is instantly palpable, but for Sudo, the fact that his underground art has found its way into a commercial gallery suggests the triumph of underground art, and he gives credit to the dedication of his generation.

A unique painting style increases in popularity

"This art movement is on the rise and it is good to see the contribution from Japanese artists," says Kenneth F. Lum, managing director of Ayden Gallery and the curator of the show. He adds that the Japanese artists have been active outside of art galleries by doing live painting, and they are also involved in commercial de-



▲ Taka Sudo, Whistler-based underground artist.

sign such as creating patterns on snowboards or skis. The Ayden Gallery brought in Japanese artists and pop surrealism years ago and has seen increasing interest in this kind of artwork in the market.

Kanomata attributes the increasing acceptance of underground art to the uniqueness of works by him and his fellow Japanese expatriates.

"This show is not about typical or traditional Japanese art," says Sudo. As a Japanese artist living in Whistler, his Japanese identity has already made him stand out. On top of that, he acquires an identity associated with extreme sports and underground culture.

"I made things in my own way," says Sudo.

Describing the skull in his painting *Feral*, he says "The skull is a banal subject matter in underground art."

However, he purposely chose it for the painting, as he believes he can "make it look different."

Vancouver is more accepting of underground art

Having lived in Tokyo and Vancouver, Sudo finds Vancouver more accepting for his arts.

He says, "What I want to express in my painting is chaos. Both Tokyo and Vancouver are giving me the impression of chaos."

In Tokyo, he saw people hurrying to work and the city packed with information; in Vancouver, life is much slower, but people's

cultures are overwhelmingly diverse, which is another dimension of chaos to him. However, he says that he embraces both kinds of chaos in life because they are both organic.

Kanomata feels the same way. She creates dream-like fantasy images and found pop surrealism the best way to express her identity in Vancouver.

She says, "I feel I can better communicate with people through my drawing, and more people in Vancouver accept my works than in Tokyo." ✍

Hiraki

Sept. 12–Oct. 12, Ayden Gallery
www.aydengallery.com
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Photo courtesy of Taka Sudo

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that the start of its history is in progress, that the departure point is this short moment when one looks back towards the past and the last two steps.

Vancouver makes us realize that our temporal distance with its beginnings is brief. The brevity of Vancouver's past changes our relationship with the city. We are not here to observe, preserve, continue or modify history. We are here to make history, to make from our personal histories that of a city, of a land rich with an extreme – almost savagely so – beauty. We are here like all the others, coming from elsewhere, with our own culture and history. To each their vision, to each their lifestyle, to each their own uniqueness. It is up to us to build a new horizon, a new cultural entirety comprising all cultures.

So, is this the reason we call Vancouver a "multicultural city"? A multiculturalism dependent on the breaking of the spatial continuity of the world's past history, launching all the while, a solemn call. Come here to make history.

Certainly, multiculturalism in Vancouver uncovers its seductive face. It is progressing towards an unknown yet promising future. It is proud to be here and doesn't stop searching for sense and direction.

However, this multiculturalism is far from being formed by the cultural diversity. It represents, to tell the truth, a certain diversity of communities. Here, communities are a sort of cultural nutshell. Finally, it is a random assembly of different ethnic and cultural communities on the same land, and it's missing a connecting wire,



▲ Vancouver's chaotic, accidental beauty.

The cultural story that is Vancouver seems certainly to be like a rough draft enriched with our otherness. However, it is lacking in unity. This story is the personal story of each of us and the history of this city is the history of the distant. One might say that Vancouver's past never happened here. The cultural history of Vancouver is nothing other than the diverse pages of history turned elsewhere.

a wire capable of linking all these cultural options together in order to attain unity.

In short, Vancouver learned to create itself freely from our pasts, which in turn speak constantly of elsewhere. As for us, we learned to live together with the offerings of the present, to create the future and to thus leave a rich heritage for the generations to come. ✍

Translation Chris Heron

Photo by Ashu Shah