

Memorandum: Soichi Kiyooka, My Landscape

In 2022, I met Soichi Kiyooka.

To borrow the philosopher Shozo Omori's idea, perhaps it is a mistake to regard the image of an object that can be seen on photographic paper as a kind of false image, that is, a temporary image that has been torn away from an entity somewhere else, but rather as a manifestation of the world to me in the form of a photograph.

If so, we could say that we have experienced a certain landscape with a certain date and time through the photographs taken by Kiyooka, couldn't we? And there, Kiyooka existed exactly as a world, as a landscape, as a particle that shines in the wind, depending on the various manifestations created by such mechanisms as "Sha-kaku" (a term often used by Kiyooka to refer to the so-called angle of view), photosensitive materials, filters, aperture and number of seconds of exposure. In this sense, I met Kiyooka.

To the extent that one is compelled to say so, Kiyooka's landscape photographs are, to borrow the title of the exhibition he has named himself, "My Landscapes."

The technical signature of Kiyooka's meticulous handiwork is relatively easy to discern in his photographs: framing that takes advantage of the perspective created by the wide-angle lens, the dynamic contrast of light and dark created by the filter work and darkroom techniques used in shooting, and the pan-focus depiction that impulsively connects near and far views.

Shifting the emphasis from technique to subject matter, it can be said that Kiyooka's photographs record not a few aspects of flux. For example, withering flowers and grasses, ice, waves, the weathered appearance of rocks, and the temporary interweaving of objects and light. These are the kind of beings that simply express the never-ending transformation of life in their own bodies. Especially for landscapes with snow and ice, we can infer that he had a special attachment to these landscapes, as is evident from some titles of his exhibitions.

White snow brings a limpid condensation of light to the photographic paper. Ice, which appears in its own unique form depending on the location and temperature, imprints the purity of the body with minute and continuous changes in gray. The

appearance of these objects in Kiyooka's works makes me imagine the modest communication between the photographer and the objects in the act of taking photographs.

By the way, the physicist Ukichiro Nakaya was the first person in the world to artificially generate snow. As is well known, he is the father of Fujiko Nakaya, an artist who presents fog, an irregular phenomenon, as a sculpture. In one of Nakaya's essays on snow, he reminisces about photographing the crystals.

Although we think we know snow crystals quite naturally, we must not forget the obvious but stark fact that their characteristic shapes are delivered to us with optical help.

It is also fitting that Nakaya began making and photographing artificial snow in the 1930s, a time when New Objective Photography, with close-up photography as one of its symbolic techniques, was flourishing.

Among the various nourishing passages, the episode of photographing snowflakes and their aspects is particularly interesting. Using a thin fiber from a match shaft with the tip folded off and the saliva of the researcher, the crystals were held upright for the purpose of photography. In other words, while taking care not to damage its shape as much as possible, the snow is stabilized in a posture that is, perhaps, detached from its natural state.

Perhaps Nakaya with equipment set up in the open air, where the temperature is well below zero, observation of snow crystals in fluttering with powdery snow is somewhat in tune with that of Kiyooka with his camera in his hand.

In Nakaya's essay and Kiyooka's photographs, we can imagine them humbly trying to align themselves with the existence in front of them, rather than trying to manipulate nature to their own will. Eiko Miwa, who wrote an exquisite critique of Kiyooka, probably described it in the following way, which I'm convinced, including its poetic phrasing.

(...) Mr. Kiyooka of Oku-Nikko did not place his subjects under his control, but rather stepped aside and stood alongside them. He had used his technique in order to hear the other's song, which could't be heard without it.

This attitude will probably lead to the possibility of finding in oneself, the photographer, the same quality as that of the subject,

in other words, the possibility of finding one's own state of being that is in flux with the world. I can read Kiyooka's words as such for me now.

When the two vibrations of nature, which never ceases to change, and I, who surrender myself to the flow of time, suddenly rise and come together, a work of art is born as a sign of this.

I would like to think that Kiyooka's "my landscape" is not the possession of the landscape by me, but an awareness of the homogeneous existence of me and the landscape. I am like this ice and snow, like the rock surface washed by the tide, like the grass and flowers swaying in the sunlight through the trees, and like this tinny shadow.

Yu Shinoda, Photographer

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