

Introduction By Toshiharu Omuka (Surface of Being 4.22.2015 – 5.15.2015)

In literature, we have the term “reader.” A reader can be anyone from an ordinary person to an expert, and there is no fundamental hierarchy implied by this word.

In the world of contemporary art, what do we call the “reader” of this medium? The word “audience” is better suited for the theatre and other performing arts. If we say “spectators,” it evokes an image of a crowd experience, completely different from an individual’s enjoyment of art. It’s difficult to think of an appropriate term that expresses the singularly private, personal experience of standing before a painting or a sculpture.

It is well known that the activity evoked by the term “reader” – that of silently reading text alone – is a modern concept. In earlier times, reading out loud was the norm. Modern painting is not any different. In the early Meiji period, the Aburae-jaya (“oil painting tea house”) of Asakusa was set up like a carnival spectacle. Or in even more recent history, for their Hiroshima Panels (Genbaku no Zu), the artists Iri and Toshi Maruki directly acted as guides explaining their artwork.

To speak in literary terms, I am not a “good reader” of Keiko Miyamori’s work. That’s all I wanted to say in the beginning and have somehow gotten off track. My difficulty in discussing art using language may be traced back to my own shortcomings, but this problem is not just an individual one. Much of the focus in art is directed at the artist, so much so that there is barely a proper term devised to describe the viewer. This points to an underlying issue in the history of critical linguistics. I’m not making light of this failing, and I understand that I myself am hardly free of blame.

This is the second time I’ve written about Keiko Miyamori’s work. About 20 years ago in 1996, Seiichi Watanabe passionately curated a show, “Dialogos 1996 - Conditions of Contemporaries” at the Contemporary Art Center at the Art Tower Mito. I had nominated two young artists, Keiko Miyamori and Ayumu Kondo, for this show and was asked to write some words for this occasion. At that time, Miyamori was in the US for a residency, but I never thought that she would continue to base herself out of America. I also never imagined that she would later move from Philadelphia to New York, and would continue to produce art there. I’m sure Miyamori herself never intentionally planned such a path for herself when she first visited the US.

Would it be too much to say that this new exhibition, taken as a whole, expresses what these last 20 years have been, and also what they have not been? I’m not saying this to be irresponsible. Ever since I saw her small show at the University of Tsukuba, I’ve known without a doubt that Miyamori’s work continues to tell the story of her present (and her past).

20 years ago, I ended my introductory writing on Miyamori with these words:

“I’m no fortuneteller, so I won’t try to predict Keiko Miyamori’s future. That said, if she continues to move along the path of her destiny or allows herself to be lead that way, she will faithfully continue to be a creative artist.”

(From “wall” to “gate”: an essay on Keiko Miyamori, Dialogos 1996 exhibition catalog)

I’ve had the opportunity to see Keiko Miyamori periodically in the years following that exhibition; at our house in Tsukuba, and also last year and the year before that in Manhattan. So I know that my words have not been proven false. At this show, I look forward to reaffirming that faith, not just as an individual viewer, but as part of a collective of viewers.