

## Preface

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Yuko Hasegawa

The present volume, *Japanorama: Contemporary Japanese Art since 1970*, is the book version of the catalogue for the *Japanorama* exhibition (published in French) that was held at the Centre Pompidou-Metz (in the city of Metz), a branch of the Centre Pompidou in Paris, in 2017. Consisting of texts by eleven Japanese and French writers as well as introductions to the artists and exhibition materials, it is my hope that this book will go beyond the catalogue and become an important reference that discusses and introduces audiences to contemporary Japanese art and visual culture. The *Japanorama* exhibition drew some 100,000 visitors over a three-month period and was highly acclaimed, winning a full page of coverage in the New York Times. This is the first time in thirty years that an exhibition has sought to showcase the history of contemporary Japanese art, since *Japon des avant gardes, 1910-1970* was held at the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 1986. Considering that the catalogue for this earlier exhibition was only available in French, the fact that the content of this exhibition is being introduced in Japanese and English is also significant in terms of archival value.

The texts by each writer, which offer not just introductory outlines or explanations but a unique, critical perspective on contemporary Japanese art, have an ar-

chipelago-like diversity to them that connects the contemporary art of this country, with its complex cultural background, to its visual culture, thinking, and political and economic contexts. How can contemporary Japanese art and visual culture, the transmission of which is lagging behind the globalized world, be showcased to a foreign audience? We received many requests from foreign audiences for an English-language edition of this book, and this Japanese-English publication hopes to respond to the expectations of art professionals, students, researchers, as well as art lovers in general, both Japanese and foreign. In addition to all the writers who have kindly agreed to having their texts reprinted here, the Centre Pompidou-Metz, and all participating artists, I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to all those who provided images and plates, and Kotaro Shimada and Mio Harada for their editorial assistance. I would also like to thank Soichiro Fukutake, the Japanese Friends of Centre Pompidou chaired by Takeo Obayashi, and Richard Colas of Chanel for their generosity and understanding as patrons of culture.

This book is dedicated to Emma Lavigne, former director of the Centre Pompidou-Metz and current president of the Palais de Tokyo.

Translated from Japanese by Darryl Jingwen Wee

## Preface for French version

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Serge Lasvignes

President, Centre Pompidou and Centre Pompidou-Metz

Emma Lavigne

Director, Centre Pompidou-Metz

In her novel, *The Silence Museum*, Yoko Ogawa tells the story of a young museographer who takes up his duties in a mansion on the edge of the world, where he must record, arrange and exhibit a collection of objects, relics of daily life and the imprints of the passage of time, composing a reflection on the memory, the accumulation and the obsessions that underlie the elaboration of any exhibition. “Japanorama,” orchestrated by curator and artistic director of the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo (MOT) Yuko Hasegawa, is an embodied, organic and sensuous crossing that makes audible and palpable the pulses of creation in contemporary Japan. A seasoned museographer who took part in the foundation of the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, a place where present time and the reality of an artistic scene animated by perpetual movement pulsate, Hasegawa offers us a unique panorama of creative activities in Japan that allows us to challenge some generally accepted ideas. On the one hand, Japanese art today cannot be circumscribed as a well-defined entity of its own. It is in exciting dialogue with fashion, architecture, music, the art of manga and anime, and the performing arts that a contemporary Japanese “visual culture” has emerged with vigor since the end of the 1960s. A culture so special that it immediately gives rise to deep feelings of attraction and fascination, still intact. On the other hand, the little we think we know about this contemporary Japan is quickly overturned by a wealth and profusion of practices and visions, which Hasegawa has articulated with brilliance. It was necessary to look from within in order to take into account this extreme diversity and to understand the relationship between art and society in Japan today. She has thus selected some one hundred and ten artists, many showing work for the first time in France, and organized the two floors of the museum that encompass the exhibition using an archipelago motif in the image of the country, with the help of architects from the firm SANAA (Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa).

This exhibition is all the more important because it is part of a prestigious

line of events that have formed the history of the Centre Pompidou. In 1986, the institution organized the exhibition “Avant-Garde Arts of Japan 1910-1970.” Designed by a team with a wide range of skills, this multidisciplinary event continued the great dialogues “Paris-New York” (1977), “Paris-Berlin” (1978), “Paris-Moscow” (1979), and “Paris-Paris” (1981). The Centre Pompidou-Metz salutes this heritage with its Japanese season, inaugurated in September 2017 on the occasion of the opening of “Japan-ness. Architecture and urbanism in Japan since 1945,” and “Japanorama” (October 2017-March 2018) takes over from “Avant-Garde Arts of Japan,” placing its cursor at 1970, where the previous exhibition left off. The friendship between our two countries has thus clearly grown over the years. The collection of the National Museum of Modern Art at the Centre Pompidou now includes more than twelve hundred Japanese works. The Centre Pompidou-Metz, designed by Japanese architect Shigeru Ban, with Jean de Gastines, had already staged an exhibition of the artist Tadashi Kawamata in one of its galleries in 2016. Finally, the Japanese season planned by the teams of the Centre Pompidou-Metz does not stop with “Japanorama,” since, from January 2018, a gallery will be used for an exhibition of the art collective Dump Type, pioneers in multimedia arts, while the spaces dedicated to the performing arts will be enlivened by the Japanese atmosphere throughout the season thanks to an exceptional program designed by independent curator Emmanuelle de Montgazon, who has invited leading figures in performance, dance, music and theatre. This season also promises to be a prelude to the program Japonismes 2018. As part of this large-scale event, the Centre Pompidou in Paris will host a retrospective of the film director Naomi Kawase and an exhibition dedicated to the artist Ryoji Ikeda.

The history of this friendship therefore continues, with the help of remarkable artists and lenders, such as the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, and with the support of an unfailing partner whom we would like to warmly thank, The Japan Foundation, co-organizers of “Japanorama.” Thanks to this shared energy and precious collaboration, the Centre Pompidou-Metz is very happy to make perceptible, for one season, the metabolism of the Archipelago, the constant reinvention of creation permeated by the concept *ma*, defined by Arata Isozaki: “Space = void + *ma*. The word *ma* originally meant the ‘natural distance/time between two things existing in a continuity’; it has come to designate ‘the in-between, the space between object and object.’” Thanks, also, to the richness of the work of the artists, whom

we of course wish to thank as well, their reflections, emotions and impressions activate a memory put back in motion. This collective poetry intervenes in the invisible space of our identities, comes to qualify this void and make it meaningful, inviting rich crossings in this panorama of the Japanese archipelago.

Translated from French by Kenjiro Matsuda

# Japanorama: An archipelago of perpetual change

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Yuko Hasegawa

Japan is, in a certain sense, a singular country. This archipelago in the Far East, rich in a cultural heritage of more than two thousand years, was one of the first Asian nations to modernize itself at the end of the 19th century. Japan modeled its own history by escaping from the cultural colonization of the West, notably of its language. It is a country where tradition and cutting-edge technology coexist, where harmonious coexistence with others rests on the concept of a loose and supple “subject.” A country that establishes an organic relationship between man and nature, all the while deconstructing traditional perceptions of nature as well as the environment that surrounds us — Japan is a composite entity that also maintains a certain ambiguity.

In this era of globalization, there are numerous reasons that might lead one to be interested in Japan. The exhibition *Japanorama*, which opened in the autumn of 2017, poses the question of how this Asian country, a former site of experimentation for Western “modernism,” can represent a cultural stimulus and a source of inspiration for Europe today as it faces rupture and an uncertainty that obscures the future. The experimental process of modernization, launched at the end of Japan’s isolationist policy (*sakoku*) after the country opened itself up to the world at the end of the 19th century, did not take the form of a “revolution,” but rather a “restoration,” and was marked by two wars. In 1945, two Japanese cities served as laboratories for the technology of mass destruction represented by the dropping of the atomic bomb. Numerous democratic experiences took shape under the American occupation — notably the constitution — and Japan became a model of reconstruction and industrialization. Against the backdrop of the experiments brought about by modernization, Japan underwent a unique process of hybridization, fusion, and coming-and-going between two cultures: it survived and adapted itself to these experiences of modernization, in order to arrive at its current state.

As a result, Japan has become an ensemble of paradoxes that manifest themselves in terms of a kind of coexistence between tradition and technology, or even through a sort of discrepancy: that which exists between the profound Japanese respect of nature and their cold indifference to its destruction during the economic miracle. This is an attitude that can appear contradictory, indeed schizophrenic. During his studies of “nature” in Japan, the orientalist and philosopher Augustin Berque remarked that this term did not merely refer to all kinds of natural environments. As the social also permeates “nature,” Berque saw that the respect for a