

| Opening Statement - Introducing A Lighthouse called Kanata

“A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” Romeo and Juliet, William Shakespeare

Yufuku Gallery was founded by my father Mitsumasa “Tom” Aoyama in 1993 upon the unglamorous backstreets of the Minami-Aoyama district, tucked away from view in an obscure and slightly unattractive Postmodern building completed right as the Japanese bubble burst into a kaleidoscope of tears and shattered dreams.

My father was the first tenant of this new office, coined Anney Aoyama in lieu of the building owner’s affection for the idyllic alpine town in France, and little did my father, nor the owner of the building, ever fathom that the gallery he had founded there together with his second wife, to not only pass the time but to sell porcelain pots from the kilns of Kyushu, would not only last 27 years in the same location it had started in, but would be owned by his son from his first marriage (that would be me), and that this tiny gallery would grow into a dynamic business exhibiting in global art fairs from Maastricht to Miami, placing works in over 50 museums the world over.

Life moves in strange ways, indeed.

Little did I expect to work with my father. I barely knew the man, as my parents separated when I was 9, and I did not see him again until I was 18. My mother had raised my sister and I on her own, and we moved from Tokyo to New York, to Chicago and then back to Tokyo in a span of 7 years.

But after leaving Oxford in 2003, I suddenly found myself immersed in a world I did not know before. There was a deeply Eastern beauty still underappreciated in the West, and I took upon it as one of my missions to work as a cultural ambassador, to promote and support artists that were unique, who created works that could not be made 100 years ago, nor 100 years from now, which would stand the tests of time, that would inspire generations into the future, yet could be embraced from persons from all creeds and cultures, in any day and age of humanity.

It was not *Japonisme* that I wished to promote, but an aesthetic that was inherently Japanese in concept and in creation, and was something essentially different from the contemporary art that was prevalent at that point in time. Our artists pointed to a Return to Innocence, to a story of art that was not dictated by the preconceptions of the West, of a time when art was made with beauty and an underlying technical elegance lacking in the mass-produced fabrications often found within contemporary art.

It is because of these artists that I am here doing what I am doing today, and I am forever filled with passion, adoration and pride in being able to do what I do for you.

I quit my job and founded my own art dealership, Toku (Eastern Skies), in the Spring of 2007 in a tiny one room apartment with my wife Namiko, whom I married that same Summer. I only had a glimpse of what I wanted to do, but without an artist or a client to my name. Yet slowly and surely the pieces melded together, and we grew and grew until my father and I ultimately combined our businesses together in 2011, with me helming the eccentric mantle that was Yufuku.

The name Yufuku is comprised of two characters – Yu, more commonly read as Tori, is the word for the Chinese zodiac symbol of the Rooster, and Fuku meaning luck. As Yufuku was born in 1993, the Year of the Rooster, my father’s second wife’s fortune teller dreamt up this name, claiming that the name was an auspicious one. The “Lucky Rooster” stuck around.

Yet as you well know, the Yufuku of 2020 is no longer the Yufuku of 1993.

Our artists and aesthetics have changed greatly. We are no longer a domestic gallery but an international one. We’ve outgrown our place of birth, and must now move to a larger home, thereby leaving behind the postmodern temple of Minami-Aoyama for that of a modest tower at the famed intersection of Nishi-Azabu. And not only are we moving, but we will be shedding our name as well.

The Yufuku Gallery of tomorrow will be renamed A Lighthouse called Kanata.

Kanata means “Beyond” or “Far Away” in Japanese, a romantic ideal imbued by the two characters that comprise it, literally meaning “Towards” and “You.” Towards you, I wish to be, but you are far away. This is a quintessentially Japanese ideal, filled with ambiguity and nuance.

Like much in our language, it gives the impression that you, of all persons, is far from me, and yet, we long and yearn to be together. It is adoration, adulation, respect and reverence yet from a distance, voyeuristic, metaphysical and indivisible.

Yet essentially, the way it rolls off one’s tongue is simply beautiful.

Kanata. KA. NA. TA.

Coincidentally, the word is also comprised of the initials of my family: my daughter Kii, my wife Namiko, and my son Towa. But, of course, this is mere coincidence.

And why a lighthouse? The lighthouse is a symbol of many integral values we hold dear.

Firstly, there is a saying in Japanese called “Ichigu wo Terasu”, or to “Illuminate a Corner”, words spoken by Saicho, the founder of the Tendai school of Japanese Buddhism. There are many talented artists in Japan today who are unknown, forgotten. We will shine a light on these artists, regardless of accolades, name recognition, age, sex, or credentials, and will only judge by the beauty they create. The overwhelming majority of our artists today have been found in this manner, and we will continue to do so. The lighthouse serves to illuminate dark and forgotten corners where artists lie waiting to be discovered.

Secondly, there is another saying in Japanese that reads “Todai Moto Kurashi”, or “It is dark underneath the lighthouse”. The closer you are to something, one cannot see what’s standing right before your very eyes. Most Japanese are oblivious to the wonders of their own culture and aesthetics. Yet those who are far away can see the light. The West, in fact, have long supported Japanese aesthetics, and were often the first to pick up on the beauty of things that the Japanese could not see. Ukiyoe, Jakuchu, the Gutai School and the Mono-ha, Sugimoto, Kusama, Ono... the list goes on and on, Japanese art and artists that had been forgotten in Japan, but were greatly appreciated in the West. By highlighting Japanese aesthetics outside of Japan, we hope for greater recognition of today’s artists by those who are willing to support them, and in turn, we strive to reintroduce and influence Japanese eyes for future generations with the beauty that is lying right in front of us.

And lastly, these are challenging times, the future uncertain. The night is dark and full of shadows. This is exactly why our artists need this gallery more than ever. And we will continue to shine a light at the dark and cold waters of the vast ocean we call life, hoping to steer these ships to safety, to the future, and to the beyond. My gallery will serve, and will continue to serve, as a beacon of hope for today’s artists and the artists of tomorrow.

And I will be unable to shine this light without the support of you, our dear friends and clients, who have supported our mission with grace and generosity. This new gallery is not only for our artists. It is for you.

And lastly, it is for us, my team, my comrades, the people who make us “us”. You are doing incredible things, and this new home is for you to dream anew.

At a Lighthouse called Kanata, a new dawn rises.
The light nears.

Wahei Aoyama
Owner
A Lighthouse called Kanata



序章 西福からア・ライトハウス・カナタへ

「たとえ薔薇はどんな名前で呼ばれども、変わらず甘く香る。」

ロミオとジュリエット

ウィリアム・シェイクスピア

名前なんて意味もない。実体こそが大切である。

私は幼少期より自分の「過去」には興味がなく、「今」も過去の内に含まれ、常にまだ見ぬ「未来」ばかり、夢みてきた。アートフェアの最中でさえ、目の前の景色よりも、次のフェアの景色ばかり想像してしまう。過去の輝かしい実績も、素敵な思い出も、不思議と忘れてしまう。しかし、失敗や悔しい思いは忘れない。なかなか満足しない性格なため、どうしても前に進みたがるのだ。だから人一倍せっかちであり、人一倍、先へ急ごうとする。

思えば、西福創立の1993年は癸酉。故に西福という一風変わった名前を、ある占い師が付けた。あれから27年という月日が流れ、店主も代わり、作家も変わり、そして扱う作品も様変わりした。主な取引先は海外の美術館、また外国のコレクターとなった。しかし、変わらないものもあった。それはギャラリーの場所、そして西福という名前。

世界が見る西福の表舞台での姿と国内の姿に大きな乖離が生じた今。過去の姿のままでは、次のステージに上がれない。変わるのが目的ではない。移転も改名も、あくまで手段である。

なにせ、まだ見ぬ景色がたくさんあって、作家さんと交わした約束も未だ果たせていない。悔しい気持ちになり、不甲斐なさに苛まれる。

そのため、大切な作品を託してくれる作家さんの信頼に報いるためにも、お客さまの飽くなきご期待に応え続けるためにも、そして私たち自身のまだ見ぬ夢を実現するためにも、移転と改名は、もはや避けては通れない必然と化したのである。

A Lighthouse called Kanata.

カナタという名の灯台。

いささか珍しい名前に聴こえるかもしれない。

ただ、灯台という象徴こそ、今の私たちが大切に思う理念を現している。

その理由の一つに、「一隅を照らす」ことこそ、ギャラリーの根底にある務めではないだろうか。西福は、埋もれた存在に光を当て、新たな価値を創造し、遠く彼方へその想いを提唱してきたギャラリーである。流行りに走る事なく、有名無名問わず、男女問わず、年齢問わずに作家を発掘してきた。そして今なお、固定の価値観に捉われず、私たちが信じる美意識からブレることなく、今日まで邁進してきた。そしてこれからも、この理念を全うしたい。

また、世は「灯台下暗し」である。

故に、私たちの大切な活動として、はるか彼方へ日本美術を広め、海外で認知してもらうだけでなく、作品の販売に従事してきた。啓蒙だけでは不完全。売る事こそ食べる事、すなわち生きる事である。結果、作家にも作品にも活力が漲る。そして、世界中に広まった日本の芸術は、やがて日本人の下へ帰し、「逆輸入」という流れで日本国内に広まることになる。これは日本の美術史そのもの、いや、日本の近現代史を現している事象である。

浮世絵、若冲、具体美術、もの派や草間弥生など、日本人は自分の近くに佇む美に気付かない習性が予てよりある。しかし、諸外国、特に西洋に肯定された途端に、あたかも当たり前のようにその美を讃え始めるのだ。これは皮肉でもなんでもない。ただただ、今の日本人の現実を映している。灯台下暗しだからこそ、私たちは広い世界に向けて活動し続ける責務がある。

そして何よりも、この混沌とした世を照らす「希望」を広めたいと願う。

日々流れるニュースに心が折れそうになる。コロナに貧困に戦争だ。ましてや、現代作家の作品を買う日本人のお客さまは少なく、海外で活躍したくとも、生活に追われる芸術家にとって、世界を目指すのも困難である。そのため、真美を追求するどころか、作家は大衆迎合の作品に傾倒し、過去の名作を繰り返し模写し続ける。現状では、挑戦することを恐れるのも当然だ。一寸先は闇である。

しかし、人生は一度きり。チャンスは幾度もない。

時はいま。

次の世代に何を残せるのか。

100年後、200年後の日本人のために。

そして世界のために。

闇夜の航海をやさしく照らす灯台のように。

芸術家が夢を託し、お客さまがその夢に包まれ、そして私と社員の夢が叶う場所へ。

導かれるがままに、過去と未来は一つとなり、光はやがて希望と成す。

これより、西福は灯台となる。

A Lighthouse called Kanata.

夜明は近い。

ア・ライトハウス・カナタ

青山 和平

