

αM Project 2019:

Plans for TOKYO 2019

Guest Curator: Tomoko Yabumae (Curator, Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo)

vol. 2 風間サチコ Sachiko KAZAMA

BABEL



The Plans and Practices of a 'Have-Not' Creator – The Works of Sachiko Kazama Tomoko Yabumae

Sachiko Kazama's works are always realized through a meticulous process of "planning." She explores the various causes and effects of history, and engages in researching the visual styles of all regions and time periods to create sketches that respectively incorporate these aspects. The sketches are then brought together and integrated to form a blueprint for a vast image reminiscent of a historical or mythological painting that is then further enlarged and engraved with outstanding skill to produce a woodblock from which a single print is finally made. It is a "plan" that is carefully orchestrated at the hands of the artist alone in her studio that is situated on the corner of a quiet residential district. Since woodblock prints can be produced in large quantities both inexpensively and without the need of skilled expertise, it has often been linked to historical, political, and social movements as a form of grassroots communication media. Kazama takes advantage of the characteristics of this method as a means for individual resistance, and further sublimates it to the spectacular visual realm of those in possession of wealth and authority. In doing so, she succeeds in exercising her sole power as an individual in overthrowing the rigid structures of control that have been implemented throughout history under the pretense of "planning." For this exhibition, Kazama transfers the setting in which her "planning" process takes place –from behind the closed doors of her studio to the exhibition room, all the while aiming her criticism towards urban systems that alienate human beings, and further to the ghosts of the modern era that had served to support it.

Dyslympics 2680 (2018), a central work featured in this exhibition, depicts the opening ceremony for a fictitious Olympic games held in the Japanese Imperial Year of 2680 in the neo-futuristic city of Dyslympia, controlled by a philosophy of Eugenics. It is well known that in the real world in the Japanese Imperial Year of 2600, in other words, in 1940, plans had been underway to host the never realized Tokyo Olympic games. In the same year, as all-out war systems had strengthened, the National Eugenic Law was established to allow the surgical sterilization of "people with serious genetic disorders." Inspired by her detailed survey of such course of events that indeed can be regarded as an ultimate "plan" to manipulate life, this work draws connections between the Olympic games and its honoring of superior spirit and body, and the wartime drafting system that served to select its citizens accordingly. From the canon containing the outstanding genes of "Hidetsurumaru" that is fired up into the sun in a celebratory salute, to the "A-Rank" youths marching in service, and other "C," "D," and "E" ranking youths who were to become human shields and sacrifices due to being rendered physically or psychologically inadequate, what is depicted here is the sharp contrast between the overall beauty of the composition and the individual tragedy reflected in the details.

On the other hand, alongside her consideration of the individual that is constantly at the mercy of unopposable power, at the core of Kazama's work is a strong interest in the almost god-like presence that is involved in the creation of the cohesive whole. That which can be discerned from time to time in this exhibition series titled *Plans for TOKYO 2019*, is the presence of Kenzo Tange who had proposed "A Plan for Tokyo 1960." Ever since marking his debut as an architect with his design for the "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere Memorial Hall" which in itself was devised on a national project scale, Tange's grand vision, while providing incentive for the Metabolism Group, had led the way for the times when urban planning and national projects were being increasingly proposed. Such movements for grand scale development could be observed throughout the 1964 Tokyo Olympics to Expo '70, and further in Kakuei Tanaka's *A Plan for Remodeling the Japanese Archipelago*, eventually coming to an end as a result of the 1970s energy crisis. Kakuei Tanaka had been an important motif from the early stages of Kazama's career, who as an artist continues to vividly portray the circumstances surrounding Japan after the collapse of the economic bubble while attempting to unravel the nation's various courses of history. In addition, Kenzo Tange is also a figure that she considers necessary to reengage with, which in this exhibition becomes a point of reference in adding new context to some of her previous works. For example, one of her representative works *The Whirlwind of the 13th District* (2005) takes Odaiba (the 13th landfill district) as its subject, entrusting past public projects that were proposed and forgotten upon the floating ghost of Battleship Yamato. What is observed in the background of this vast ship is the Fuji Television Headquarters that is known to be the last project Tange had designed. It is perhaps possible to draw comparisons between the preliminary sketches presented in the exhibition which illustrate the "planning stages" of this work, and the vision of "A Plan for Tokyo 1960" that was to be realized upon Tokyo Bay. *Staffage H.L. –the Shinjuku-chuou Park* (2008) is a work taken from a series depicting homeless people and landscapes across Tokyo. Observed in the distance is the manifestation of a symbolic space for the community, which is a characteristic of Tange's architecture. However, through borrowing the eyes of those who look up from the ground at this mammoth structure, Kazama's work presents us with some key questions. Who constitutes this community? Who and by what means was this decision made? In her new work *Story of blue ball* (2019), she deconstructs the transcendence of the "Creator" through presenting another narrative (not of "planning" but of "fortuity") related to the birth of this symbolic space.

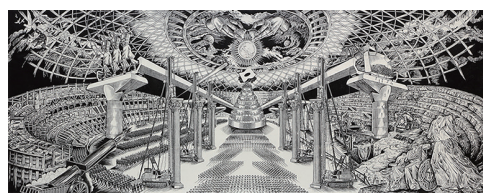
For Kazama, looking back upon history and borrowing from it becomes a fighting weapon for those who are deprived of power and authority. Through the solitary act of giving form to foreboding signs of collapse and failure, discerned by bringing together and integrating elements of the past, present, and future, what she conveys is a parody regarding the workings of the all-mighty "Creators." It is now our turn to map out within our minds the future that lies ahead of the numerous "plans" that simply continue to progress towards the very moment of their completion.

●Sachiko Kazama

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By using abundant color expressions between black and white, Kazama engraves social and political satire and nonsensical human acts sometimes comically and sometimes delicately on her woodcut print with a delightful sense of humor. Through enormous research on history, past and present events intersect and create a fictional story in her work.



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1) "Dyslympics 2680"
2018, woodcut print, 242.4 x 640.5cm
Photo: Kei Miyajima
© Sachiko Kazama
Courtesy of MUJIN-TO Production

2) "The Whirlwind of the 13th District"
2005, woodcut print (panel, Japanese paper, sumi ink),
182 x 421cm
Photo: Tsuyoshi Saito
© Sachiko Kazama
Courtesy of MUJIN-TO Production

3) "Staffage H.L. – the Shinjuku-chuou Park"
2008, woodcut print (panel, Japanese paper, sumi ink),
67 x 52cm
Photo: S&T PHOTO
© Sachiko Kazama
Courtesy of MUJIN-TO Production