

## **English Translation of Judges' Discussion of the Young Portfolio (YP) 2024**

Panel Members: KONMichiko, MOMOSE Toshiya, SETO Masato (Deputy Director)

Moderator: OGAWA Junko (Photo Coordinator)

**Momose:** This was my first time on the YP selection committee, so I felt both excited and anxious. As somebody who takes photographs himself, I found the idea of evaluating other people's works quite intimidating. Looking at all the works, I was impressed by the power of the prints. During the initial selection when we simply looked at the data, I felt I could not understand what the photographer was trying to achieve in several of the works, but when I saw them in print form, my thinking changed and I felt quite moved. I feel very grateful to have been given this opportunity.

**Kon:** This is the second time I have participated in the selection committee so I was able to look at the photographs dispassionately, and while I felt a strong affinity to some of the works, others were filled with a completely different kind of power. I have always worked with gelatin-silver prints and so I was able to look upon these works with a feeling of nostalgia, but I did not limit myself to them and felt a new freshness in the works that expressed themselves through the unrestrained use of other media.

**Seto:** The best thing about selecting works for the YP is that the photographers are all under the age of thirty-five so many of the works are experimental and they are all trying their very hardest. These photographs will represent early works in their careers. Some have a fresh feel, some are rough but it is the imperfections they present that provide their main attraction.

**Ogawa:** All of you on the selection committee produce different types of work, but were there any conflicts of opinion?

**Kon:** As photographers, we all work in different fields, but we all share the ability to recognize a good work when we see it. It is not just photography, I think the same is true of every field, be it novels or art, good works are easy to recognize.

**Momose:** We are all well-established photographers so even though we looked at photographs belonging to different fields, I do not think there was much difference of opinion.

**Seto:** The fact is we did not simply make our selections depending on our individual tastes, but rather on whether a work was good or not and in this respect we all share a common eye.

### **Style of Presentation**

**Ogawa:** There were a lot of participants who submitted single photographs, while others submitted series of works. Do you have any advice for people regarding their submissions?

**Momose:** I think they have to be looked at on a case-by-case basis. However, I felt that some of the single prints that had all been created by one photographer shared a common viewpoint and I believe that if the photographer were to organize their work a bit more scrupulously, they could transmit their message to the viewer more clearly. However, I think these works were carefully picked up during the selection process.

**Seto:** Personally, I don't think I looked at the works that way, I would go further and say I felt that some of the photographers submitted series that were lacking in a clear theme and I do not think that they should bother to make such an effort to create series. Presenting a group of photographs as being a series when there is no consistency can have a negative effect.

**Kon:** I don't think it matters if the work is a series or not. As the photographers continue to take pictures, develop their own eye and by consolidate this the photographs will automatically become more connected.

**Ogawa:** Lots of different-sized works were mixed together, do you have any advice regarding the size of a work?

**Momose:** Looked overall, there were several works that I would have liked to see in a slightly larger format. On the other hand, there were some that were so large that I thought they could have been made a little smaller. However, that is simply my opinion, and whether it matches that of the photographer or not is another matter. The basic criteria is that they should be a size that satisfies the artist.

**Kon:** It is good to have a standardized size that you are happy with, but for an exhibition, the size should be determined according to size of the venue or the image of the work.

**Seto:** There were a two or three photos that I felt did not need to be so big. I think this should be thought about more carefully. On the other hand, there were some photos that could have been made larger.

### **The State of Documentary Photography**

**Ogawa:** Recently, it would appear that conceptual documentary photography is becoming more mainstream than the kind of straightforward reportage photography that transmits a story. What are your thoughts on the future role of photojournalism?

**Momose:** Today, information can be conveyed directly from the scene so video and SNS are the fastest. Of course, it is possible to do the same with photography and photographs can also be used to look back over the past. In this context I think it is the use of photography to express one's own opinion that is an important element of medium's role.

**Ogawa:** I know you work in a different field, Mr. Kon, but do you have anything to say about the state of photojournalism?

**Kon:** I believe that powerful photographs depicting reality can move society and people. If we look at Ukraine's Sergey Melnitchenko's photographs in this year's selection, we are attracted to them by their beauty, but at the same time they allow us to witness the pain and sadness of the reality they depict. I was amazed that the works of the ordinary people living there could have such power to move people's hearts.

### **AI Generated Photography**

**Ogawa:** Among this year's entries, there those by Kaya & Blank work that appeared to be a fusion of natural and artificial, during the initial selection, we never quite worked out what they were, but after discussion came to the conclusion that they were wonderful. I think that

the viewer falls into the trap of the photographers' trick but this was probably their plan all along. However, what I would like to think about is the 'veracity' of photography in this day and age. As we approach the 190<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the invention of photography we are forced to consider the difference between a photograph that has been taken to record a 'true' image and one that has been created by AI.

**Momose:** We are already seeing images like that and have to accept that this is the kind of world we are living in. Today, we already see a lot of works taken by other people or consisting of combinations of things whose origins are unknown, things that we don't know how they were created, but personally, I have a rule that when I present a work as my own, it has to be one that I photographed myself but I think it is possible that if I were to use AI, I would input my own work then use that as the basis to create something new. I know we are living in a difficult time, but I would not be against presenting works that were created in that way.

**Ogawa:** Mr. Seto, what would you do if a work created by AI work was submitted to YP?

**Seto:** That is a difficult question. What defines a photograph? Regarding this, in the days before the appearance of AI, a cultural anthropologist laid out the three factors that defined art. First he stated that it had to be created by the human brain. A chimpanzee cannot create art. Chimpanzees are said to share 98% of the humans DNA, but it is the remaining 2% that is crucial, it is what make it impossible for them to produce art or give birth to religion. I think this is essential, if a work is not created by a living human being, then it is not art. A.I .might have been created by humanity, but if it starts creating things on its own, then the results are no longer those of a human.

**Ogawa:** It can be difficult to tell whether a picture is fake or not, but photographs can freeze time, they remain in our memories, they create a record of history, and works like those by Bastien DESCHAMPS of France, can convey a feeling of energy. They possess passion.

**Seto:** They also have individuality. You can feel the humanity behind them.

### **The Significance of YP**

**Ogawa:** Mr. Momose, you had your work selected in the first year of the YP, making you one of the first generation of YP alumni. Can you tell us about your own experiences of submitting work to YP in 1995?

**Momose:** It was almost 30 years ago that I submitted my work and to be honest, at that time I did not give much consideration to the importance of having my work included in a museum collection. However, with the passage of time I have grown older and began to realize its significance, I feel that it has helped me a lot. There are lots of open competitions, but the YP competition is unique, and as I discovered during the selection process, it is necessary for applicants to bring their own world to the competition and in order to achieve this, they must enjoy the process of creating their works. I felt this most strongly.

**Kon:** In the beginning, I focused on exhibitions and was not really interested in having my works collected by museums, but as the works leave my hands, I have begun to realize the importance of them being properly evaluated, managed, and preserved. The works I produced when I was young are valuable because they possess an energy and freshness that I cannot replicate today.

**Ogawa:** At YP, when we return the works we attach a note stating which selection committee member evaluated it, and starting last year we have also started to send out messages of support to the finalists who came close to being selected. In that sense, I think the program provides encouragement to the applicants, but what do you think is the most important aspect of YP?

**Seto:** Even if a work does not pass the selection process, it gets returned to the artist who submitted it with a note attached. They say that makes them very happy to learn that their photo had been selected by somebody like Michiko Kon and it is a message that is certain to reach them. When I heard that, it also made me very happy.

**Momose:** The age limit for applicants is thirty-five so I think that several of the works are quite experimental. There were some that made me wonder if they were really photographs, but I found interesting was that the artist considered them photographs and selected them to submit to this competition. They might as well have drawn a picture and submitted that and I would like to ask them why they felt the need to categorize them as photographs. This goes to show the range of diverse entries that are attracted to this open competition.

**Ogawa:** It is the museum's policy to insist on original prints for exhibit and preservation but I wondered if there is a possibility of relaxing this restriction to permit more diversity.

**Seto:** It has been a long time since we entered the digital age and I am sure we will see more technological innovations in the future. We might even end up asking, 'What is a camera?' I think the time will come when the viewer will become more involved with the works. The history of photography has been one of continuous development.

### **What is photography?**

**Ogawa:** The history of photography is still less than two hundred years old and during this time various techniques have been developed for photographers and viewers. In closing, I would like to ask what photography means to you.

**Seto:** What does photography mean to me? This is the hardest question to answer. I believe there are photographs that I need to take, and that is what I live for. Everyone is different, but for me personally, that is what I think.

**Kon:** What attracts me is the ability of the camera to capture the things I like, to stop time and preserve them.

**Seto:** The camera is fascinating in that it captures even more than you would expect.

**Momose:** For me, photography is something that I live with. Photography is something that always close to hand, whether it be a camera or a print. I have always lived with photography, and I can't imagine doing anything else.

(Recorded on June 6, 2024, at the Kiyosato Museum of Photographic Arts)