



## **Who does Tokyo's "Sky" Belong to? –A Discussion on the Works of Bontaro DOKUYAMA**

Tomoko Yabumae

Bontaro Dokuyama resigned from his former job and had taken on a new name to pursue contemporary art practice in the wake of the contamination of his hometown due to the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. The other day he showed me a copy of his family register, smiling as he said, "I don't know if this could be considered an artwork." Written under the column indicating one's legal place of residence was the address "1-1 Chiyoda, Chiyoda City, Tokyo." On the occasion of this exhibition that attempts to reflect the various aspects of current "Tokyo," Dokuyama had moved his family registry to the Imperial Palace. Using his own presence as a medium, he had succeeded with ease in forming a connection between the landscape of his hometown that had been dramatically transformed as a result of an unprecedented accident, and "the unchanging landscape" that is preserved in the center of Tokyo. One does not doubt that the accident in Fukushima had presented a significant impact on Dokuyama to the extent of him questioning all the knowledge and values he had thus far developed, and even innovating his very name and career. That being said, the fact that he had chosen to become an artist as opposed to engaging in direct measures such as denuclearization movements is indeed something that presents us with a certain implication. Thereafter Dokuyama has produced works based on interviews he conducted through visiting various individuals related to Japan's negative history including former Korean 'comfort women' and Taiwanese people who were educate under Japanese rule, yet he constantly maintains a neutral gaze as he stands behind the camera, while the words of these witnesses based on their personal memories at times serve to waver our perception. One could indeed say that he is relearning the history of friction through the voices of those involved. As reflected in his light and flexible manner in which he changes his life and family register, Dokuyama himself becomes a constantly changing and transparent presence that functions as a medium for visualizing multiple histories and social structures. Frameworks of thinking are not guided by prescribed ideologies, but are instead established based on the experiences of each individual viewer of the work. This exhibition series titled "Plans for TOKYO 2019" takes "Tokyo" as its setting and attempts to present possibilities of art that goes against the principles that control people's behavior and experiences as represented by concepts such as planning, management, and objectives. Recognizing that simply voicing one's assertions can eventually lead to the same impasse, perhaps Dokuyama, as his name suggests, had chosen to become a drop of "poison" (doku) = artist that brings incessant and unrelenting change to people.

What I would like to focus on at this point is the fact that people's assertions and messages that are often seen communicated in Dokuyama's work through means of singing, pointing, and shouting all harbor a sense of aimlessness that make them appear as if vanishing into thin air. An example of such presented in this exhibition is the video work "Even After 1,000 years" (2015) and its new related piece "Innocent Tale of the Sky" (2019), which both derive their motif from the collection of poems Chiekosho (Chieko's Sky). In the former, following the famous passage "Chieko says Tokyo has no sky" as featured in Kotaro Takamura's Chiekosho, Dokuyama himself can be seen pointing at the "real sky" that extends above Mount Adatara in the pouring rain as he calls out to Chieko. In the latter, a man sensationally proclaims how Tokyo's sky is being infiltrated as he stands on a construction site in Tokyo where last minute developments are underway for the Olympics. The emphasis here is not on the content of message that is being advocated, but rather on the bodily gestures and behavioral aspects pertaining to the act of assertion and voicing one's opinion. The motif of the "sky" also continues into the space towards the back of the exhibition room. Presented here, are "paintings" created by rain falling from the sky that is gradually disappearing in various parts of Tokyo. Although the imbalanced connection between Tokyo and Fukushima is an important motif in Dokuyama's works, the abstract nature of his oeuvre is not a direct denunciation of this and instead guides us towards a critical gaze against the use of power such as advocacy and possession. Who does the sky belong to? The contrast between Chieko and the forces that attempt fill the city with buildings is applicable to everyone, and through it highlights the presence of the "sky" as a public space that belongs to no one.

What emerges here is another theme observed throughout Dokuyama's practice that in essence originates from the issues confronted by Hiroshima, that is to say, his questioning of places and people's rights while at the same time serving to visualize public space. "The 4th branch, Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry" (2016) also featured on this occasion, concerns "anti-nuclear protest tents" that had been erected in the public space located in front of government buildings along with proposals to preserve it as an ideal permanent facility (also touching upon the contradiction that the "objective" of it protesting residents remain indefinitely unfulfilled). According to Dokuyama, two officials from the Ministry who came across information on social media regarding this project had visited the tents on the premise of it being for the sake of art, thus creating an opportunity for them to engage with its residents for the first time. This indeed is an example of the emergence of a public space as a place for different voices and opinions to interact with one another. Furthermore, the exhibition also introduces new works inspired by urban sharing systems like Airbnb that has seen explosive developments in recent years. By experimenting with this idea of each area of the city being available to rent, Dokuyama enables us viewers to envision a fictional image of Tokyo that exists through a system of partial ownership, and is a place where multiple forces of power go to and fro. In addition, Dokuyama clearly communicates that by acquiring a certain right as mentioned in the outset, even the closed and innermost "central" areas of the Tokyo (the Imperial Palace) have