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桜はこれまで、時代によって様々な扱われ方をされてきた。

明治期には、欧米列強の侵略と日本の海外進出によって政治的に切迫する中で、和歌に詠まれたような「日本らしさ」や「日本の伝統」が強く意識され、桜の花びらが重なり咲く様を全体主義として見立てられ、ナショナル・アイデンティティの象徴とされた。

また、昭和のはじめ戦中には、若き日本兵が故郷に住む家族や友人、恋人を守るために身を捧げ、潔く散っていったとされた。ひとはその姿を、ソメイヨシノ がぱっと咲きぱっと散る姿に重ねて、彼らの死の儚さを敬い憂いた。

終戦直前、ある画家が日本陸軍の命を受け描いた一枚の戦争画が、軍に受け取りを拒否された。敗戦後、約23年が過ぎたある日、数多ある戦争画を書籍としてひとつに収録するという話が持ち上がり、完成後一度も公開されることがなかったその絵も含まれることとなった。作者は掲載にあたり、戦後の日本社会の価値観の変化にあわせ、作品の一部を黒く塗りつぶし改作したという。

今は見ることのできない黒塗りの墨の下には、散る桜花が描かれているそうだ。

戦後、日本で全国的に植えられたソメイヨシノは、戦後復興・高度経済成長の象徴となった。今日では百円硬貨に刻まれており、震災復興のシンボルとして扱われたり、総理大臣主催の慰労会の名称にもされている。毎年春には花見客が各地で賑わい、一般にも広く愛されている。

時代によって都合良く解釈がなされてきた「桜」。それを利用したのは一体誰なのか。

私は、今まで以上に表現の自由について考えている。作品が他者に鑑賞され、自由に解釈されることは望ましい。だが、広く一般に、あるいは特定の誰かの利益のために作る作品とは。「公益性」を重視した先に失うものはあるのか。

今回は、これまでに多種多様な解釈をされながら、この日本の世相を表してきた「桜」をテーマに、これからの「表現」と「自由」について考えたいと思う。

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Thus far, the cherry blossom has been used in various ways, depending on the times.

During the Meiji era (mid 19th century - early 20th century), the political scene was charged with tensions generated by widening imperialistic incursions by the Western powers and aggression by Japan in other Asian countries. In this atmosphere, there arose a strong awareness of a so-called "Japanese essence" or "Japanese spirit" that traditional "waka" poetry was thought to manifest. Similarly, the cherry blossom, whose petals overlap when they bloom, was given a totalitarian interpretation and adopted as a symbol of the national identity.

From the late 1920s until the end of World War Two, the populace was told that their young sons were going off to war to gallantly sacrifice their lives to protect their families and loved ones. The same narrative linked soldiers whose lives were cut short to the evanescence of the Somei-Yoshino strain of cherry tree blossoms, which fall just a few days after reaching full bloom, in the minds of mourners.

Just before Japan's defeat, a war painting made by a certain artist at the order of the imperial army was rejected by the same upon its completion. One day about 23 years after the war, a project was organized for publication of the many war paintings in a single collection. This collection was to include the aforementioned painting, which had never once been shown to the general public after it was finished. For the publication, the artist reportedly blotted out part of the painting and changed other parts for alignment with the change in outlook on values in postwar Japanese society.

It is said that, beneath the Indian ink used for the blot-out lies a depiction of scattering cherry blossoms.

After the war, the Somei-Yoshino cherry trees planted across the country came to stand for reconstruction and booming economic growth. Today, the 100-yen coin is stamped with an image of cherry blossoms, which have since been used as a symbol of recovery from the Great East Japan Earthquake and the pretext for a gala annual gathering hosted by the country's prime minister for his supporters, among other things. Every spring when the blossoms open, places for viewing them attract throngs throughout the country. As this evidences, cherry blossoms are widely loved by the general public as well.

In sum, the cherry blossom has been arbitrarily interpreted to suit the purposes of the times. Just who has used it?

These days, I have been thinking about freedom of expression even more than before. It is desirable for works to be appreciated and freely interpreted by others. But what about works that are created for the benefit or interest of the general public or a specific someone? Is there something lost as a result of an emphasis on the "public good"?

Taking the cherry blossom, which has reflected the state of Japan while being interpreted in ways that changed with the times, as my theme, I intend to ponder the meaning of "expression" and "freedom" in this exhibition.

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