

## For This Publication

### Chiyu Uemae

Writing the manuscript for “*Contemporary Art: My Case*” has felt unavoidably rushed. When I worked on my previous book, *Jigadō: The Way of My Painting*, I had surgery for a subarachnoid hemorrhage; this time, I underwent cataract surgery on my left eye. As I face the limits of a body that continues to weaken, I cannot help feeling an urgency: *while I still can, I want to give form to my thoughts for large-scale works*. Because of that haste, there may be places where the writing feels insufficient, and so once again I have taken up the pen to add to it.

My 1982 solo exhibition at the Osaka Contemporary Art Center consisted of works made through “sewing” and oil painting. Around that time, I received a letter from A saying, “Uemae-san needs to study more — as it is, it won’t do — that’s what B says.” This B was the owner of Gallery B in Miyazaki Prefecture. He had already seen the exhibition and gone home full of praise. Moreover, that same gallery had scheduled a solo exhibition of my work, and many invitations had already been sent out well in advance.

I promptly wrote back to A. Another letter soon arrived, saying something like, “Uemae-san’s paintings are of the highest rank in the world. Personally, I prefer the works from his Gutai period. But I am not a god, so I may be mistaken.”

Feelings like these were also building up when I wrote “*Poor and Skillful*” (p.117). Above all, I was deeply influenced by **Jirō Yoshihara** and **Michel Tapié**. Among the many energetic figures who came and went in Gutai, I never missed a Gutai exhibition from the first show in 1955 until the group dissolved in 1972. I also showed work continuously in the Modern Art Exhibition from 1955 to 1970, while presenting new works in solo shows as well. At that time, I carried a considerable handicap. Even now, still active and looking toward new possibilities, I continue to create — not for the sake of my career, but for the sake of making itself. This piece of writing is also an expression of the principles that stand as my proof.

Within my mind, a strong sense of inferiority and an equally firm sense of superiority flow back and forth like shifting air pressure. From the brain cultivated through all my past experiences, something like enzymes ferment, and images — perhaps they should be called *ideas* — bubble up one after another. And these ten fingers, trained to a versatility greater than any computer, engrave onto chosen materials the images carried from the brain through the nerves. What is inscribed in this way is no longer mere matter; it becomes an enduring, imperishable image of myself — a gravestone infused with the breathing breath of the artist at that moment.

I am one of those who grope toward new art. Prepared for “failure” (though I plan as carefully as I can), I often experiment boldly with form and color. Works that fail in such attempts are not worthless; they are “stepping stones” in the challenge toward something new — steps that help me leap beyond inertia and mannerism. When, amid such severe struggles, I see even a few works succeed, I feel the true fulfillment of being an artist.

On the other hand, there are times when I create in search of safety. That may mean following in the wake of a work that turned out well, making darker-toned works (which are not necessarily easy), or producing pieces that appear aged. The essential thing is to cultivate something of one’s own — neither counterfeit nor imitation — without being swayed by public opinion.

Once, a certain museum requested a work from the 1950s. While trying to repair its damaged areas myself, I ended up ruining it. I do not mean to belittle professional conservators of antique art. In addition, “*On ‘Non-Representation’*” (p.115) was also written as an expression of my own way of living.

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