

Tadasu Fujii (art critic)

## Muneyoshi Hase and Still-Life Paintings

This would be Muneyoshi Hase's third and consecutive solo exhibition at his own studio from 2019. I have already discussed his last two exhibitions; hence I would like to note the difference between this one, and the former one. Well, the “difference” might not be an accurate word. I rather take up the characteristics of Hase's sculptures, which appeared clearer for this time. In fact, his work for this time succeeds the characteristics of the previous works. Although the works exhibited at his studio have suggested close relationships with his own life, the works from previous and this occasion are connected by the continuity of his life.

For the current work, I can point out the ratio of using ready-made objects as materials has increased. Yet, those are not treated as mere “ready-made objects”. Those are the things which were related to the artist's own life before taken as the material for his work. They are inevitable waste from daily life like empty cans and bottles, or things used by his own child. More than that, edible things which are related to his life as well, such as bread, eggs, and fruits have been added to the list of materials for his work. These materials connect Hase's sculptures to the tradition of still-life paintings.

Although still-life objects are taken as motifs of paintings since ancient times, it was established as a genre of art in the 17th century at Netherlands. Netherlands at that time, in religion, was the country of Protestantism (Calvinism) which did not require altarpieces, and politically, the monarch had weaker power compared to the other European empires. Hence, instead of churches and the royal court, citizens consisted of merchants who built wealth by trading were the consumers. One of the things wanted by the populace, was still-life paintings which depict realistic things realistically. Though various things were taken as

subjects in still-life paintings, there were mainly two kinds of objects - one was food like fruits and seafood, and another was tableware such as glasses and silver dishes.

I clarified that Hase's sculptures are not from the "readymade" of Marcel Duchamp (1887 - 1968), but are in the genealogy of traditional realism paintings and sculptures, in my previous article. Tying Hase's works and still life is located at the extension of the previous discussion. Here, considering the characteristics of Hase's works by comparing them and still life would be the focus.

For still life, there is much flexibility for arranging objects contrasting to portraiture and landscapes. Although this was the one of the reasons why Paul Cezanne (1839 - 1906) was attached to still life, it can be said similar to Hase who continuously changes the arrangement of parts of his works. However, Hase's purpose is different from the one of Cezanne's which was analyzed as "Truthfulness, for him, mean above all making the viewer aware of the tension between three-dimensional reality and its representation on a flat surface." (Still Life, Erika Langmuir.) It is because the act of placement is not a preliminary step before it is transformed to a different medium, for Hase's case.

It is characterized that motifs are placed in front and back overlapping, in the composition of Dutch Still Life. The most front objects are often placed close to the edge of a table almost like slipping out. Different from the Renaissance paintings' space which continues infinitely into back, the background space is only hinted, and foreground motifs seem floating by bathing spotlights, in Baroque paintings. The relationship between motifs in front and at back (overlap perspective) contributes acquiring the space in paintings.

Although lighting evenly illuminates overall space or using natural light, the depth made by the overlapped motifs is the characteristic for the Hase's exhibition. At the right corner viewed from the entrance of studio, there is the largest assemblage featuring the linear objects which are popping out diagonally from the mass. The arrangement of child's white shoes or baby bottles at front is

not the one concludes at here. The viewer's perspective is limited when viewing the assemblages which are placed in the left side of the studio and in the storage. It makes viewers be aware of the relationship of foreground and background, instead of the expansion.

It ends up concerning the depth by viewing each part of the works. Although there are materials including rusted sheet metals in the works, viewers can see through most of those since they are either mesh shaped, or holes are punched. Vacant cans and clear bottles showing the open taps suggest the depth of their interior. It is not only the numbers of motifs are increased more than the previous two exhibitions. This kind of expression of the depth creates complicated and miscellaneous impressions which have been barely felt from his works.

On the other hand, there is the great difference in the height of viewers' eye point between still life and Hase's works. In still life, table-top motifs are close to the height of painter's eye point, and located at the slight overlooking position. For Hase's works, most of the objects are placed much lower than viewers' perspective, and they end up looking down them. This difference affects that each motif's existence appears strongly in the Dutch Still Life, but that does not appear in Hase's works. For Hase's case, viewers' psychological distance is far from the motifs.

Most of the materials used for Hase's latest work are common products which go through the cycle of "mass production - mass consumption - mass disposal". Without discussing if they can be the material for art works, in the first place, they are not psychologically close to us. Moreover, it might be appropriate to take some distance to consider these current social situations. Although this kind of attitude can be called as "criticism", if you follow its origin, you would end up seeing the works from Nouveau Réalisme during the 1960s (this can be the genealogy of still life in vast meanings). Especially, Arman (1928 - 2005) who made the accumulation of trash in the bin as his art work, or Daniel Spoerri (1930 - ) who fixed leftovers, dishes, or silverware after a meal on a table board,

are the ones.

However, the criticism on Hase is not as direct as ones onto them. It comes from the strength of self-consciousness based on the fact that he is at the side of criticizing, and being criticized simultaneously, as a member of the modern consuming society. This is also demonstrated by executing his arrangement of the disposal materials in each work thoroughly. Each disposal item would have an individuality along with the relationship between Hase. The viewers do not just overview the whole work, but also are able to gaze at each piece by getting closer prompted by the relationship of Hase and objects. That action means receiving a message from Hase through his works.

A message through the works - that had been included in his past works, but it was not easy for viewers to receive it. The foremost reason exists in that he does not put any title on his works. At least for me, the fact that this kind of message started appearing clearly can be taken as the new characteristic of his current work.

Not only the superbness in descriptive ability of replication was respected, but also what was inside of work was regarded important in the 17th century Dutch Still Life. One of the well-known messages is the "Vanitas" which expresses transience of life, current world, and human. In some cases, it is not easy to be read, since being proposed by allegories. Also, for Hase's works, it might be able to be read as one of the art works which allegories are contained in. The consideration through juxtaposing his works and still-life paintings will lead to that possibility.

(Translated by Jun Itoi)