

The bridge – Norman Takeuchi Exhibition at OAG by Ambassador Kanji Yamanouchi

"Bridge" between the past, present and future.

"Bridge" between events happening in the real world and the viewers.

"Bridge" between Japan and Canada.

Hearing the voice of May, Ottawa's late spring is also in full swing. The fresh greenery and tulips of the official residence are wonderful. On a personal note, one year has passed since I assumed my post. Every day, I discover something new about the relationship between Canada and Japan, and I feel the breadth and depth of the relationship between the two countries.

This "Ottawa News" is about an event that made me really feel the deep connection between Japan and Canada. It is a retrospective exhibition by Norman Takeuchi, a Japanese Canadian painter, which is currently being held at the Ottawa Art Gallery (OAG).

This retrospective will be held for five months from 1 April to 27 August 2023 at the main exhibition hall (Salle Spencerville Gallery) on the 3rd floor of OAG. The title is:

Shapes in Between: Norman Takeuchi - A Retrospective

Artist Norman Takeuchi

Artist Norman Takeuchi was born in Vancouver in 1937 as the eldest of three children of a father who emigrated from Japan and his mother who was born in Vancouver, B.C. After the Pacific War began on December 8, 1941, the Canadian government invoked the War Measures Act on January 8, 1942. On February 7, Cabinet Ordinance No. 365 was issued, declaring an area within 100 miles of the Pacific coast of British Columbia a "protected area," and forcibly detaining Japanese Canadians living there into camps. In later years, as a result of the redress movement of Japanese Canadians, the Mulroney administration officially apologized for the mistake of this measure in 1988 and paid reparations. However, the



days of his family's forced displacement were burned into the eyes and mind of young Norman, and later became one of his important motifs as an artist.

Eventually, Norman would study at the Vancouver School of Art (now Emily Carr University of Art + Design). After graduating in 1961, he first worked briefly in an advertising agency. He then moved to London and began his painting career.

Young Norman returned to Ottawa after living in London for over a year and solidified his footing. In 1965, his "Interior with Two Women" was selected for the 6th Biennial of the National Gallery of Canada. Then was the key milestone on April 23, 1966 - marriage to his lifelong partner, Marion Pflueger. He then returned to London with funding from the Canada Council for the Arts. They were now living in London as newlyweds. London at the time was the hippest city in the world, with the likes of the Beatles, the Rolling Stones and Twiggy. The stormy London of the 1960s, where the history of the British Empire, the royal family and avant-garde art coexisted, must have been a treasure trove of inspiration and stimulation for young artists.

Returning from London and emerging as an up-and-coming graphic artist, Norman was selected to be part of the design team for the 1967 Montreal Expo. Then, at the 1970 Osaka Expo, he was one of the designers of the Canada Pavilion. One of his works, co-designed by Neville Smith, was the "Super Bus" which, installed in the Canada Pavilion, stole the show. It also graced the cover of Vancouver's Sunday Sun newspaper. At the pavilion, Canadian rock music played loudly from the psychedelic-colored school bus, vividly portraying the young Canadian generation at the Expo.

Also worth mentioning is that for the Osaka Expo, Norman visited his father's home country of Japan for the first time in his life and stayed there for half a year. For Norman, who had so far lived as a Canadian, consciously or unconsciously excluding "Japan" from his own identity, including memories of wartime camps, this was his first opportunity to face "Japan". Norman has indicated that this trip was crucial to the beginning of an internal process of his eventual acceptance of his Japanese

heritage.

Retrospective at OAG

So, this is his retrospective exhibition.

First, about the venue for the retrospective exhibition - Ottawa Art Gallery (OAG). Opened in 1988, it is the municipal gallery for the City of Ottawa, and specializes in Canadian historical and contemporary art with a focus on artists from this region. Admission is free and open to the public. In addition to over 1,000 permanent collection objects under its care, it holds regular exhibitions, including special ones such as this retrospective of Norman Takeuchi's work. They run programs that introduce the works of local Ottawa artists, building close ties with the local community. They also hold events such as workshops, lectures, concerts and film festivals, as well as provide opportunities for a wide range of people to come into contact with art.

The Norman Takeuchi Retrospective is the first major Japanese Canadian special exhibition to be held at OAG. Moreover, the current ultra-modern building was completed in the spring of 2018. However, this is the first large-scale exhibition dedicated to one artist in the new building since the COVID-19 pandemic. There are a total of 83 works on display, ranging from his earliest studies and works to his most recent creations, with a wide variety of styles and themes. The whole exhibit is organized into six themes:

- Abstract art
- Graphic art
- Still Life
- Conflict work that deals with issues of social injustice
- Japanese cultural heritage
- Legacy of internment

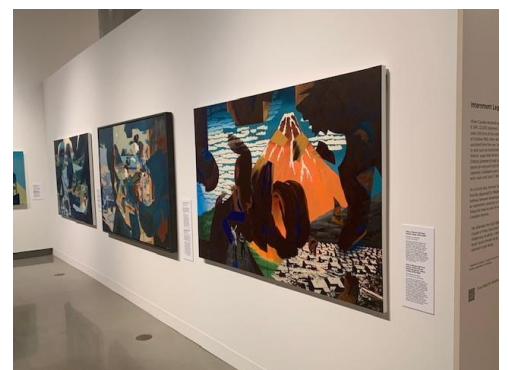


Ms. Catherine Sinclair, Deputy Director, Chief Curator at the OAG, served as the lead curator and worked closely with co-curators Sachiko Okuda and Bryce Kanbara. She began preparations for the Norman Takeuchi retrospective four years ago, and was grateful for the team for their insight into the Canadian art context as well as the local and national Japanese community connections.

Direct contact with a large number of works drawn in various styles is a rare experience to get close to the artist's essence, and at the same time, it is extremely difficult to narrow down the works by prioritizing representative pieces and excellent works. Looking back it was a series of difficult choices. But she said, with a big smile, that she was "really proud" of the exhibition.

When I visit the gallery several times and look at the works in the retrospective, I realize that the turbulent times that Norman Takeuchi sensed are exquisitely reflected in his works. Looking at them will make you forget time and be drawn in. From psychedelic and pop works to serious works that denounce social contradictions, the atmosphere of each era is conveyed. 1975's "Figure with Still Life" (1975) is a powerful piece that combines representational art and sharp abstract paintings in one work. The woman sunbathing is reminiscent of the Rolling Stones' "Made in the Shade." His diverse techniques and styles include vividly colored collages, striking acrylic paintings in rich colors, and black and white. Even in monochrome works, the infinite gradation between black and white creates a delicate expression. His work, "View of Mount Fuji From Lemon Creek" (2012-2018), which uses Hokusai's Red Mt. Fuji as a motif and marks history, is particularly impressive. The hardships that Japanese Canadians experienced during the war are oozing out. As I was taking in the Legacy of Internment section, Norman explained that "certain subjects are more impactful when presented indirectly."

The retrospective also effectively presents items that illustrate the process of creating Norman's work. There



are many sticky notes on a scrapbook with ukiyo-e prints that could be motifs. A small box containing a large number of used and shortened B3 and B4 pencils evokes Norman's precision. If you look at his study sketches, Norman's beautiful lines are clear and refreshing to look at. One realizes that the process of creating a work itself is also art.

Special Reception

Norman Takeuchi's retrospective exhibition is very significant in terms of cultural exchange between Japan and Canada, and also in terms of the history of immigration within Canada. On April 13th, the Embassy of Japan and OAG co-hosted a special reception at OAG's event space to inaugurate this retrospective. There was a specific reason for choosing this day. This is because the opening date of the 2025 Osaka-Kansai Expo is April 13, two years from now. As mentioned above, for Norman, the 1970 Osaka Expo was an event that had a great impact on both Japanese Canadians and artists. I've heard Canadian government officials have the idea of having Norman play a role again at the 2025 Osaka Kansai Expo. Coincidentally, on the same day the exhibit opened, in Osaka Prime Minister Kishida was participating in the groundbreaking ceremony for the Osaka-Kansai Expo, so I feel this could be an act of fate.

The special reception was also a great opportunity to introduce Japanese culture to the guests, so I asked Mr. Shima, the official residence's chef, to make sushi for the reception participants. He prepared the toppings the day before and served 400 pieces on the day, but they were all eaten in the blink of an eye. It proved the skills of Chef Shima and the overwhelming popularity of Japanese food. I feel that Japanese culture is becoming more familiar to Ottawa citizens.

Mr. Mark Sutcliffe, Mayor of Ottawa, was also a guest at this special reception and gave a heartwarming speech.

As the host of this special reception, I also made a brief greeting. I pointed out the following three points from my



perspective as the Ambassador to Canada.

- (1) This year marks the 95th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Canada in 1928. This being three years before the Westminster Charter of 1931 officially established Canada as a sovereign nation, I realized the depth of the relationship between Japan and Canada. Moreover, today is two years before the opening of the 2025 Osaka-Kansai Expo. It is very meaningful that this reception is held on this special day.
- (2) The works exhibited in this Norman Takeuchi retrospective are very colorful and diverse. Individual works contain anger and sadness, but as a whole, there is hope for the future. In response to the times, he boldly changed his style and pursued individualistic expressions, reminiscent of Miles Davis and Pablo Picasso.
- (3) Artist Norman Takeuchi is three “bridges”.

The first is a “bridge” that connects the past, present and future.

Second, is a "bridge" that connects events happening in the real world with the viewers of the work.

Third, is a “bridge” that connects Japan and Canada.

I concluded my remarks by stating that I am proud of Norman Takeuchi and his group of works, and that I wish for the success of the retrospective exhibition and the further deepening of the friendship between Japan and Canada.

55 years after the 1970 Osaka Expo, the 2025 Osaka-Kansai Expo will be held. Through one artist, I would like many Japanese people to know not only the splendor of each work, but also the deep bond between Japan and Canada that has been forged by history.