

A Braille Letter (2015, Exhibition "Stardust Letters", Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art

Earlier, I left Manila in the Philippines and switched the aeroplane in the city in the Arab country called Abu Dhabi, and now I am writing this on the plane to Berlin. I assume those who read this letter or those who listen to the audio recording are either the ones that can read Braille, are blind, or perhaps even both.

Since I was asked, on this occasion, to make an art piece at this venue, which can be enjoyed by blind people, I have been thinking about writing a letter that can be read in Braille, but I've been unsure as to where to begin. To tell the truth, this is probably the first time that I have been given an opportunity to make an art piece for blind people, even though I've been making artwork for many years and exhibited at various museums. I've made this piece, thinking about how our paths can cross in this museum on this special occasion, the paths that led us to this curious chance meeting amongst visitors who can and cannot see and the artist.

You've just come through the room where you saw a forest of threads hung from above your head. The threads are hung down from a big net stretched across the room overhead, and at the points where threads are attached to the net, a Braille letter is formed, which can be read only when they are seen from above. For those who are blind, the braille letter rendered across the net cannot be seen, but even for those who can see but cannot read Braille, it looks merely like a constellation of stars.

The content of this letter is only known to me, the people that worked on this project, and those who can read Braille. Just as I cannot see the world that blind people usually perceive, there are things that only blind people can see and yet are imperceptible to those who are not blind. By creating this slightly unusual situation in the museum, I thought that I would be able to present a kind of a shared experience amongst us, creating the intersection of different paths that have led us to this exhibition. (Having said that, if there are many people who want to know about the content of the letter, I would consider providing a way in which they can find out about it but only outside the museum.)

Although I currently live in the capital city of Germany, Berlin, I often fly to various places for work-related reasons, particularly for setting up exhibitions. Two months ago, I went to the small town called Tilburg in a southern region of the Netherlands for making pieces of fabric, and last month I went to Munich and Norway. Soon after that, I travelled to Manila, the Philippines, and now I'm on the way back to Berlin. And after a week or so, I have to go to Norway once again, and next month I will fly to Japan for the opening of my exhibition in Hyogo. After Hyogo, I will go to Tokyo for another exhibition of mine, and in autumn I am scheduled to go to Seoul, South Korea.

I will be 39 years old this summer, but as I am leading such a hectic life, which is inevitable since I am an artist, I often ask myself: "Am I ever going to get married?" "Do I really have to have a child?" Since I am an artist, I do not have a salary as such every month, and if I don't get paid regularly I cannot pay the rent. So often as I think about those things that even while I am travelling those thoughts appear in my dreams.

In the midst of the hectic time, I meet people of various ethnicities with different cultural backgrounds, and I speak to them in my non-native language, English. So, even though I do not perfectly understand what they say, I work with them for the common goal of setting up an exhibition at exhibition venues. At an opening party, I would wear a dress and heels that I rarely wear in my daily life, but after the event, I come back to my studio and bury myself in work. That is my life at the moment.

Of course, when I go to a foreign country, I come across unfamiliar customs and particularities of the region. Even amongst Europeans, whether Germans, the Dutch or Norwegians, there are differences. Singaporeans and Filipinos are also very different in terms of how they act and behave despite their geographic proximity.

In the same way that I identify people according to where they are from, whether German, Dutch or Filipino, for them I am probably the representative of Japan, even though no one has said so. They all try to know more about Japan through me. In such an instance, I am torn between opposing feelings. On one hand, I feel that I want to say nice things about my own culture as much as I can, yet, on the other hand, there are many things about my country that I want to criticise as well.

However, no matter what I say, because of its complexity, I cannot communicate to them what I really want to say. But perhaps, I merely want to remind myself, albeit in vain, the reason why I am where I am in my life and experience what I experience, which is more personal than solely related to my cultural background. In the same way, no matter how closely I observe and analyse people of different ethnicities, I would not be able to understand the depth and complexity of their feelings towards their motherlands.

By the way, today, I took a cab to the airport, and on the way, I saw slums in the inner city of Manila. Litter was scattered around and everywhere to be seen on the streets. The laundry that looked still dirty was hung at the windows covering the frames entirely. In dusty narrow alleys, a lot of children were playing almost naked but with full of joy and a beaming smile on their face. It was in the daytime on a weekday.

I asked the museum staff that drove me to the airport why children were not in school. He told me that their parents are so poor that they cannot afford textbooks nor to send them to school. Those children that do not go to school will

eventually become street-sellers in slums, thus their future prospect is severely limited.

I told him that in Japan education till the age of 15 is compulsory and the privilege is provided to all children. In reply, he said to me sincerely that he wishes the Philippines to be soon like Japan.

The current Japanese government is not so organised as it should be, and I feel ashamed when I come across news reports in Germany about poor decisions that the Japanese government is making on various issues. Despite that, when I look outside I quickly come to realise how precious what we have is in Japan, even though we always take them for granted. Having realised that, I grew frustrated with the government in the Philippines to the extent that I wanted to rebuke them, saying "what are you doing!"

Nonetheless, I have read somewhere that people often forget the journey that has taken to get to where they are now, and thus they cannot forgive others who cannot do what they can do at once. I hope the Philippines will soon find a way, and their own unique way, to get to the point where those children can go to school. Hoping for the coming of such a day and feeling somewhat ambivalent, I finally arrived at the airport.

This is yet another story. Last year, I stayed in Singapore for about a month, as I was offered to have an exhibition there. It felt much hotter in Singapore than Manila where I was staying earlier. I remember it was very sultry and I was constantly wiping off sweat trickling down my cheeks.

Singapore was colonised by the British, and the Philippines was under the Spanish rule for hundreds of years. During the Second World War, however, both countries were invaded by the Japanese military forces, and they suffered from atrocious destruction.

The other day, I saw an oil painting at the National Museum of Manila, depicting a horrific scene where a Japanese soldier is decapitating one of the local prisoners of war. Last year at History Museum in Singapore, I saw many photographs and thereby learned the fact that the Japanese invasion caused severe poverty and starvation in the country. When I travelled around Asia, I inevitably came to know more about what my country did in the past, and facing those facts put me in excruciating pain.

Yet at the same time, I empathise with Japanese soldiers who had to obey the command of chief military officers and the country and thus remained in muggy, boiling and humid jungle infested with snakes, poisonous insects and mosquitoes. Without adequately washing both themselves and their clothes and barely eating, they were also the victims of the horrific war. The jungles that I saw in Singapore

seemed as if stained with their blood and suffering, therefore whenever I passed by jungles there I could not help but feeling intense grief and sorrow.

I'm sure that the soldiers wanted to see their lovers and mothers waiting back home and definitely did not want to do such terrible things that the local people held a grudge against. At night, as I looked up at the moon, I imagined the forced patriots who were also looking at the same moon 70 years ago in this humid country. Much to my surprise, however, I never met any locals that had strong anti-Japanese feelings while I was staying there.

When I visited Hong Kong and was having a drink in a local bar on my own last year two boys with clean-shaven heads started speaking to me. They said, "we are from Mainland China and we've heard that Japan is such an amazing country and we really want to visit." "But," the boy stuttered, "...I heard that Japanese people don't like Chinese people. Is that right?" As soon as I heard that, I thought that both sides are thinking the same. I started wondering who is behind all this, manipulating and stirring up the situation. I intuitively thought that we should never believe in what the governments and the media are saying on both sides.

On another occasion, I started chatting with a boy, the driver of a large van, who was working as a carrier that specialises artworks. On the way to the airport, we spoke about Japan. He said to me excitedly, "I'm driving a Toyota car too! I love Toyota vehicles! I think Toyota cars are the best in the world!" "Japan is incredible." He continued. "Japanese companies have developed many advanced technologies. I think the country is really amazing." I asked him how many days he works per week. He replied, "uh, how many days a week... well, my baby will be born soon, so lately, I've been working seven days a week."

Hong Kong is developing rapidly and indeed an exciting city. People there know how to sell things and I was quite impressed by their ingenious and yet sometimes shrewd business acumen. Singapore also looked thriving, probably because its economy is booming, which reminded me of the 1980s in Japan when its economy was at its peak. Now, however, Japan will never and does not need to return to such a stage of economic growth. Everyone in Japan already has TVs, radios, personal computers, and air conditioners. Taking these into account, even to an amateur like myself who is neither an economist nor pundit, it seems obvious that it is not possible for Japan to further prosper by selling and buying more things. I think that Japan should at once leave the spectre of the economic legacy behind. Instead of trying to satisfy endless materialistic need, Japanese people should seek their spiritual fulfilment. Therefore, I don't think it is right to see China as a competitor.

I think that the reason why I like living in Germany is because German people know how to live happily. To tell the truth, Berlin is not particularly a wealthy city. Without many growing industries, the job scarcity is actually quite acute. It may not be the hyperbole to say that in the city, there are not many things to see

other than the remains of Berlin Wall, the parliament, and the European headquarters of Sony. I can say with certainty that it is not an affluent city.

However, for example, even when I go to a local library near the closing time and I want to borrow books in a hurry, no one rushes me because probably German people respect the act of learning. When I say that I am an artist people are usually complementary, saying to me that it is great and admirable. That is because they feel deep respect to art. When companies cooperate with art museums and galleries their reputation in the society rises, therefore many companies try to provide financial support and their own products as a form of sponsorship.

As I'm writing the following line, "all stores are closed in Berlin except Turkish shops on Sundays," the plane has arrived in Abu Dhabi, and suddenly I found myself in the Arab world. Here, I'm switching to a plane back to Berlin.

Needless to say, the plane to Berlin is filled with many German passengers. I see a young German girl nibbling at a carrot and an apple. Many people in Europe often snack raw vegetables and fruits or even have them for lunch. I frequently witness people taking bites off them on the streets in the city. It may perhaps be better than eating sweets with lots of chemicals and additives.

I've been thinking about food a lot for several years, and I used to think that Japanese food was very safe, and in comparison with the standard in Europe, it is much safer in terms of additives, pesticides and fertilisers. Now, however, I think completely the opposite.

It is said that much food produced in Japan may have been exposed to radiation that has spread across the country since the accident that took place at the nuclear power plant in Fukushima. More importantly, though, even before then, chemical substances added to food were absurd.

In addition to that, many companies seem careless about poor students and children that consume their inexpensive products, which contain lots of chemicals and additives. Furthermore, when it comes to the importance of having a healthy diet, children seem uninterested.

Here is another reason why I like Germany. Of course, there are lots of cheap and unhealthy products in Germany too, however, when we are well informed of the issues around food production we can make better decisions. In Germany, there isn't so much difference in terms of prices as in Japan where you have to be rich so that you can afford to buy organic food, which is usually expensive. I think that German people are better informed in terms of what to eat and what not to eat.

After I wrote the above, I returned to Berlin safely, and shortly after then I flew to Norway to set up another exhibition and I came back to Berlin yesterday.

Norway is a Scandinavian country and it is so cold during the night that people have to wear a down jacket, even in the summer. While installing the exhibition at the venue an old man called Shell helped me. He works there for its maintenance and fixes things at various premises in the region. He had all the tools necessary to do that and he did everything that I asked for.

But he looked very sad, and I assumed that he lives by himself. When I looked him in his eyes I wondered what Shell has experienced in the past. Although Shell is not someone working in the field of art, he loves art. While I was setting up my work, he was gazing at me intently at all times. Every time a new piece was installed, he was full of praises for me and said that my work was amazing and beautiful. When we had to say our good-byes, he said to me kindly that it was a pleasure working with me.

While I was staying in Norway, I learned a bit about Norway's history. The reason why we as Japanese don't know much about Norway and the country's current affairs is that we often pigeonhole all Scandinavian countries as "Northern Europe" and apparently Northern European history has been omitted from the comprehensive secondary education in Japan.

Within Northern Europe, there are intricately woven histories that are not easy to unravel particularly amongst their neighbouring countries, and they are usually not quite known to outsiders. I think it is similar to the situation that we often face in Asia. From Europe's perspective, more often than not, Asian countries are simply referred to as Asia as a collective entity without knowing, for example, the complex relationships latent between Japan and South Korea, and Japan and China.

My next trip is to my own country, Japan. I will travel to Hyogo to set up my exhibition, which is based on this letter that is going to be translated into Braille. It has been over 5 years since I left Japan to live abroad, so I feel a bit nervous every time I go back to Japan for a short visit.

Particularly because Japanese people are very good at making up new words by shortening them, which do not usually make sense. For example, "morning-first" as in "in the early morning," "fami-res" as in a "family-friendly restaurant," or "perso-con" as in a "personal computer." Even within the past five years, I've come across new words that I did not quite understand.

Also, since Japanese people are very polite and gentle to others, sometimes I am concerned if my behaviour and the way I speak are considered to be impolite or too direct, as my time in Europe has toughened me up to the point where I may sometimes come across too strong.

In Europe, oftentimes people do not understand unless I explicitly say my opinions and what I want. On the contrary, Japanese culture favours subtlety and sensitivity to read the other person's intention without explicitly articulating. Therefore, when I am in Japan I have to be extra careful as to what I do and say, paying attention to those hidden messages.

And since 2011, everything seems to have changed in Japan because of the earthquake, the devastating tsunami and the ensuing nuclear incident. Yet, at such a drastic turn of the history, I was given opportunities to travel to many countries. Reflecting back on the curious itinerary that I have taken, I started pondering over what I am supposed to do right now.

Every country has its own history and problems, and yet love and warm feelings of people towards their own country are universal across the globe. My job is to make art, and through my work, I have seen many places and thought about things. If they will remain as the signs of the world that we live in, even to a modest extent, I believe that my unique experiences are meaningful.

I've written this long letter without having a clear direction. I wrote this as if I'm sending a letter to my mother or lover, and it was my intention to write without having a particular theme or clear structure. I don't know if this exhibition at Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art will succeed, but it seems to me that trying things without thinking too much has always been helpful to me and saved me many times, even though it may appear disorganised to others. Well, I do not have any conclusion as such, so I will end this letter here as it is.

Aiko Tezuka
30 June 2015 in Berlin

点字のための手紙(2015年「StardustLetters 星々の文」展、兵庫県立美術館)

先ほどフィリピンのマニラを立ち、アブダビというアラブの国にある町で一度飛行機を乗り換えて、ベルリンに帰る飛行機のなかでこれを書いています。この手紙を読んでもくださる方あるいは音読で聞いてくださる方は、点字が読める方、目が見えない方のどちらか、もしくはどちらもの方かと思います。この度、この場所で目が見えない方も鑑賞できる美術の作品を作ってくださいというお題をいただいて、点字で読むことができる手紙を書こうと思ったのですが、さてどこから書き出そうかと、ここ最近ずっと考えてしまっていました。ふだん美術の作品を作ったりそれを美術館で展示したりしている私にとって、盲目の方とふれあう機会をいただいたのはこれが初めてかも知れません。目が見えない観者、目が見える観者、そしてわたしがどのようにこの美術館で交差することが出来るのかなと考えて、この作品を考えました。先ほど通って来られた室内の糸の森は、上部に張られた大きな網の目から垂れ下がっていて、それぞれの糸はその上部の網と接する部分で点字を形成しています。目が見えない方にはその網に書かれた点字は見ていただくことはできませんが、点字の意味がわからない方にはただ星座のように見えるだけです。またこの手紙の内容は、わたしと、作品制作に携わったひとと、読み手である点字の読める方しか知りません。わたしがふだん、盲目の方が見ている世界を見られないのと同じように、目が見える人が美術館で見えないものがある、あるいは盲目の方にしか知らないことがあるという関係を作ること、先ほどの「三者の交差点」が作れるかなと思ったからです。(目が見える方で手紙の内容が知りたい方がもし居たら、がんばれば美術館外で読めるような仕組みは作ろうかなと思います)

さて、私が住んでいるのはドイツにあるベルリンというところですが、仕事や展覧会のためにせわしなく色々なところを飛行機で移動しています。先月は織物を織るために南オランダのティルブルグという田舎町に行き、先月はドイツのミュンヘンと、ノルウェイに行き、そのあとすぐにフィリピンのマニラに行き、これからベルリンに帰って、一週間ほどしたら再びノルウェイに行き、来月はこの兵庫の展覧会のために日本に行き、兵庫のあとは別の展覧会のために東京に行き、秋には韓国のソウルに行きます。私は今年の夏で39歳になるのですが、こんなような生活をしていて、結婚はどうするかとか、子供は産まないのかとか、アーティストですから毎月のお給料があるわけではなくお金が入ってくるか入ってこないかはまちまちで、入ってこなければ家賃が払えないなとか、そのような「どうしようかなあ」という要素が常に頭にあって、旅をしていてもそのようなことが夢に出てくることもあります。そんな中で、いろいろな民族、文化の異なる人たちと握手をして笑顔を交わし、お互いにとって外国語である英語を使うため完璧には聞き取れていないなかで、現場での展示作業を一緒にして、オープニングのパーティではふだんはまったく着ないワンピースとハイヒールを履いて、またス

タジオに戻って急いで仕事をして、というような生活です。当然、その土地に行けばその土地の人たちの癖とか習慣とか特徴というようなものがあって、同じヨ

ーロッパでもドイツ人とオランダ人とノルウェイ人では違うし、シンガポール人とフィリピン人の行動の特徴もまったく違います。私が彼らをドイツ人、オランダ人、フィリピン人と呼ぶように、私は彼らにとって日本人代表です。彼らは当然、私を通して日本と言う国を透かして見ようとしています。その時に、私は私のなかで、日本をうんと褒めて自慢したい気持ちと、うんと批判して悪く言いたい気持ちとに引き裂かれます。けれどそれをどこまで言おうとしても、彼らに思うように伝わることはなく、言おうとするのは、あくまで自分がこんな状況にあることを確かめたくて言うだけなのだと思います。同じように、私がどんなに彼らを観察して分析したとしても、彼らの祖国への思いは知りようがないのだと思います。

話は変わりますが、今日は空港に向かう車のなかで、マニラのスラム街を通ってきました。いろいろなゴミが散乱した路上に、まだ薄汚れているように見える洗濯物がびっしりと吊り下がった窓、埃っぽい狭い路地のなかで、平日の昼間だというのにたくさんの子供たちが裸に近い格好で元気に遊んでいたのが、空港まで送ってくれた美術館のスタッフに何故かと聞いたら、親の貧困が深刻で学校に行かせる、あるいは教科書を買ってあげるお金がないからということでした。そうゆう子供たちは、学校に行かず、ゆくゆくは再びスラム街で物売りになるなどしかないということでした。日本ではほぼ全員が義務教育を受けられることをその方に伝えると、僕たちの国もそうなったら良いのになあと心を込めて言っていました。今の日本の政府もたいがいだらしがなくドイツから見ても恥ずかしくなるニュースばかり目につきますが、少し外に目を向けると、ふだん当たり前だと思っていることが尊く見えてきたりもするし、フィリピンの政府は何をしとるんだ!という気持ちにもなります。けれど人は自分が通って来た道のりをすぐに忘れて、自分が出来ることを目の前の他人が出来ないと許せない生き物だということをごどこかで読みましたが、フィリピンもこれから彼らの独自の道を通して、あの子供たちが学校に行ける日がくると良いのに、と胸を少し痛めながら、空港に着きました。

また話は変わりますが、去年はシンガポールで展覧会があったので、一ヶ月ほどシンガポールに滞在しました。シンガポールは先ほどまでいたマニラよりずっと暑く感じられ、ひどく蒸し暑かったことを覚えています。シンガポールはイギリスに、フィリピンはスペインに、それぞれ何百年も植民されていましたが、そこを第二次大戦下に日本軍が介入し、両国とも侵略してめちゃくちゃにしています。先日はマニラの国立美術館で日本兵が現地の捕虜の首を切り落とす油絵を見て、去年のシンガポールでは日本が侵略したことで

飢饉や貧困が引き起こされ如何に大変だったかを歴史博物館で写真とともに読みました。アジアの国を旅すると、私の祖国が少し前にしたことについて胸がつぶれそうな気持ちになるのはどうしても避けられないことです。しかし同時に、この蒸し暑い、本当に蒸し暑い、きっと蛇も毒虫も蚊もたくさんいたジャングルの中で、食事もろくに与えられず、洗濯も入浴も十分に出来ない中で、国からの命令というだけで祖国に帰れなかった日本兵の思いがその土地に沈殿しているように思えてならず、昼までも夜でも、ジャングルを通りかかると、ぼうっと見入ってしまいます。恋人に、母親に会いたかっただろうな、現地で恨まれるようなことをしたかったわけではないだろうなと、夜になると月を見上げて、70年前もこの月を見ていたのだろうかと思ったりもしていました。

ところで現地に滞在することで反日感情を持った人に会うかと言えばそんなことは今まであまり経験したことがありません。昨年行った香港で、あるバーで一人で飲んでいると中国本土から遊びに来たと言う坊主刈りの男の子二人が話しかけて来て、日本はすごい国なんでしょ、日本に行ってみたいなあ。でも...日本人は中国人が嫌いなんだろう?とおそるおそる聞いてきました。私はそれを聞いてすぐに、双方ともに同じことを思っているんだなあ、操作しているのは誰なんだろう?と率直に疑問に思いました。新聞もニュースも双方の政府の言うことも、そのまま信じてはいけないと直観で思いました。また、同じく香港で作品を運ぶための大きなバンの運転手の男の子と空港までの道のりでおしゃべりになって、その男の子が「僕の車もトヨタだよ、トヨタが大好きなんだ!トヨタの車は本当に世界一だと思うよ。日本はすごいなあ、たくさんの技術を持っていて。本当にすごいと思うよ!」と力を込めて一息で言い切りました。週何日くらい働いてるの?と聞くと、何日?うーん、もうすぐ赤ちゃんが産まれるので週7日働いてるよ、とっていました。

香港はすごく面白く発展していて、どのように物を売るかをよく考えて工夫しているし、その知恵や工夫には思わずうなるようなものもありました。シンガポールもそうですが経済的にうまく行っているため、いわゆるイケイケの状態に見えました。しかし、日本はもうそのようなところに戻ることも戻る必要もないように思います。みんな既にテレビラジオも持っているし、パソコンもエアコンも持っている。このことから考えて、私のような素人からすると至極当たり前のことのように思うのですが、これ以上何かを売ったり買ったりすることで豊かになるということはないように思います。そのようなバブル期の亡霊への固執から早く離れて、なにか精神的にハッピーになる道をいち早く探して行かなければならないので、競争相手として彼らを見るのはどこかの外れな気がしています。私がドイツに好んで住んでいるのは、そのような意味で彼らがハッピーに生きる方法を知っているように思うからです。実を言うとベルリンはとても貧乏な町で産業もないし職も少ないし、壁が崩壊した象徴と国会と欧州SONYの本社くらいしかありません、という

と大げさかもしれませんが、とにかくそんなに裕福な町ではありません。けれど、町の図書館に行けば閉館時間が迫っていて慌てて本を借りる手続きをしても責付いたりしない、何故なら学ぶと言うことに対する尊敬があるからです。アートを志していると言え、たいていの人はずいね、えらいねと言いますがそれも芸術に対する深い尊敬があるからです。企業は美術館やギャラリーに協賛をすると社会での評価が大変高くなるので、多くの企業が芸術にお金や自社製品を提供しようとします。日曜日はトルコ系以外のお店は全て閉店で、と書いている間に飛行機はアブダビに着き、まわりはすっかりアラブの世界になりました。ここからベルリン行きの飛行機に乗り換えます。ベルリン行きの飛行機は当然ドイツ人が多く、女の子が人参やリンゴをかじっています。ヨーロッパのひとはおやつやお昼がわりに生の野菜や果物を皮のついたままそのままバリバリとかじります。添加物がたくさん入ったお菓子よりもずっと良いかもしれません。私は数年前から食べ物のことを考えているのですが、日本から出るまでは日本の食べ物がとても安全で添加物や農薬などの観点からヨーロッパよりも安全と思っていました。しかし今は真逆のことを思います。日本の食べ物には原発事故による放射能が実際に混ざっているかもしれないということもそうですが、それより以前にも食べ物に添加されている化学物質がひど過ぎる。それに、あまりお金がない学生や子供たちをターゲットにした食べ物の添加物への配慮が欠けているし、また子供たちの食べるということに対する意識もとても低い気がします。ここでもう一度私がドイツを好きな理由ですが、もちろんドイツにも限りなく安く怪しい食べ物はありますが、自分の意識が高ければ選んで食べることはできる。それも、日本のオーガニックフードのようにお金持ちだけが買えると言うような大きな価格の差はありません。ドイツ人は食べるということに対して、日本人よりもずっとずっと意識が高いように思います。

ここまで書いたあと、私は無事にベルリンに戻り、少ししてからまたノルウェイに旅立ち、ひとつ個展の設置を終わらせて、一昨日ベルリンに帰ってきました。ノルウェイは北欧なので夏でも夜はダウンジャケットを着るような寒さです。展覧会の準備の現場では、シェルというおじいさんが私の仕事を手伝ってくれました。シェルはその土地の建物を修理したりメンテナンスしたりする仕事をしているので何でも工具を持っていて、私が頼んだことは何でもやってくれました。しかしシェルはとても悲しい目をしていて、多分お一人で暮らしていて、シェルと目が合うと、シェルの過去にはどんなことがあったのかなあ、と思ったりしました。シェルは美術の畑の人ではないけれど、美術が大好きで、私の作業をずうっとじっと見ていました。作品がひとつずつ出来上がるたびに、素晴らしい、美しいと褒めてくれ、最後の挨拶をした時は、あなたと仕事ができてよかったと言ってくれました。ノルウェイ滞在中に、ノルウェイの歴史についても少し勉強しましたが、私たちが「北欧」と一括りにしてしまっているその内情をあまりよく知らないのは、北欧の歴史を学ぶことは日本の教育では省略されてしまっているからだそうです。一

言で北欧といっても、その隣国同士には一筋縄ではいかない歴史や思い、そのことによる緊張関係があります。このことは、ヨーロッパの人たちが「アジア」と一括りに呼び、日韓や日中の関係については知るはずもないことと、よく似ているなあ、と思いました。

さて、次の旅は私の祖国、日本に向かいます。この手紙を点字に訳して展示するために、兵庫に行きます。私は日本を離れてから丸5年以上経っているので、日本に帰る時は多少ドキドキします。というのも、日本人は色々な言葉を短くして勝手に言葉を作るのが大得意なので(例えば朝イチ、ファミレス、パソコン、などです)、実際この5年でも新しい言葉が生まれていて、時々意味のわからない言葉に遭遇します。また、日本の人は他人に対して大変丁寧なので、ヨーロッパで生きるために粗雑になってしまった私の言動が失礼じゃないか、怖く思う時もあります。それとヨーロッパの人は、思っていることや要求ははっきり言わないと伝わらないところがありますが、日本では相手の意図を汲み取る文化なので、私が気づかずに汲みとれていないものがありはしないか、少し心配になるところもあります。そして2011年以降、多くが、全てが変わってしまったように思える日本ですが、そのような歴史の転換点に、こうして外国と日本を行き来しなければならない立場を与えられたことについて、私がすべきことはなんだろうと考えています。それぞれの国がそれぞれの歴史と現在の困難を抱えていること、それに対する人々の祖国への想いは世界中どの場所でも共通することです。美術作品を作ることが私の仕事ですが、仕事を通して、私が見たもの、考えたことが少しでも現在のしるしとして残るならば、意味のあることだと思っています。

取り留めもなく長く書きました。母や恋人にあてる手紙のように、なんのテーマも、構成もないままに書こうと思いました。兵庫県立美術館でのこの展示や作品が成功するかどうかはわからないけれど、わからないままとりあえずやってみるということは、いい加減なようで、実は何度も私を救ってきたので、このまま、結論もないのですが、手紙はここで終わりにします。

手塚愛子より2015年6月30日ベルリンにて