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Ishida Takashi, *Three Rooms*, 2010

Born in 1972 in Tokyo, Ishida Takashi began his career as a painter. However, unsatisfied with “painting that stops upon completion,” he launched around 1992 or 1993 the seemingly impossible pursuit of expressing a “painting in its generative time” in order to show all the changes—formations and collapses alike—on the picture plane.¹

He first attempted “live drawings” on the streets of Shinjuku (on which he pasted pieces of paper) and a park (to which he once brought a roll of paper as long as 10 meters). Accompanied by recorded classical music or live contemporary music played by a friend, his acts were akin to dance, being more “performances” than “painting demonstrations.”² He had in mind art historical precedents of “going into the streets.” Although few resulting paintings are extant, the idea of replacing musical notes and rhythms with lines, which amount to spiraling and flowing organic forms, has been essential to his work to date.

Around 1995, he shifted to hand-drawn animation in order to focus on “moving paintings.” This effort culminated in *The Art of Fugue* of 2001, in which he rigorously applied his animation methodologies to the music of Bach. His “moving paintings” were primarily shown as “films” at movie theaters and film festivals. A painter embracing the joy of painting, Ishida returned to the basics of “showing pictures” by adding video-based installations to his repertory. Consequently, he had the opportunity to show his works at museums and galleries. In 2005, he resumed his live drawings, inspired by his improvisational collaboration with the musician Adachi Tomomi in Vienna.

In this context, *Three Rooms* (2010) is an unusual project, as the artist himself acknowledges, because it incorporates the figure of the performing painter, hitherto absent, in the frame. By doing so, he attempted to express what may be called “performance in its generative time.”

Three Rooms consists of three parts. In a room where a white canvas hung, he executed three drawings under three different situations, and differently edited three resulting videos.

A Room with Music shows Ishida’s “live drawing” in a straightforward manner. The music in the background, which was played during his act, defines both the duration of his drawing and the video. (It was interrupted only once during a changeover from one piece to another.)

In *Window*, he opened a window in the room midway through, to let in the chirping of cicadas. The open window also let in the sunlight, and the light and shadow it cast on a wall became

part of his painting, as his act continued well into night, when the room was lit by an artificial light. The editing is “cinematic,” consisting of short cuts, which preserve the actual sense of movement.

A Silent Room or a Darkening Room, in which Ishida’s act centered on and around the canvas, reveals an intricate multilayered temporality engendered by his frame-by-frame manipulation of speed and direction through various animation techniques.

Ishida’s work has been by now discussed in relation to imagery, musicality, and temporality. *Three Rooms* demonstrates that discussion in terms of the body and performance art is also vital.

The absence of the artist within the frame does not necessary mean the absence of his bodily engagement with drawing. His words from 2007 deserve revisiting: “Above all, a painter draws a line as a bodily experience of ‘being on the way to make’” (*Tama Art University Bulletin*). However, his bodily act evidently differs from that of Jackson Pollock or Ushio Shinohara, which may be reduced to single acts of “dripping” or “boxing.” Instead, Ishida deploys various tools, including a paint roller, a T-shaped water scraper, and an industrial pesticide sprayer, to draw, erase, and overlay lines. Does his act bespeak the fundamental painting impulse in humankind?

Although it only fleetingly takes place in his live drawings, the act of “seeing” in preparation of drawing a line is also notable. In fact, seeing constitutes an important aspect of Ishida’s work. His interest in all the changes—formations and collapses alike—on the picture plane is informed by him seeing them. In fact, he sees all the “forms,” from individual drawings that make animation cells to “pictures” drawn by light to “lines” made by a sprayer. As significantly as the time of drawing, the time of seeing makes Ishida’s work.

—Reiko Tomii, September 4, 2011
(Translated by author from the Japanese original)

Notes

1. Interview by *Nikka Times*, 2009; <http://www.nikkanews.com/Visitor/special/ishida.php>.
2. In preparation of this text, I conducted a telephone interview with Ishida, September 3, 2011.