

## Museum changes a city

MINO Yutaka

### **Abstract**

On October 9, 2004, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa opened in the heart of the historic city of Kanazawa. In the first year after its opening, 1.57 million visitors from home and abroad, well beyond the number originally expected, have come to the museum. This is three times the total population of Kanazawa City, while many museums in Japan are facing a hard time to survive due to financial difficulties.

One of the main reasons for our attractiveness to visitors, is the change of the museum's attitude from the traditional, paternalistic one of "showing works of art to people" to "reaching out to people with art." A unique characteristic of this museum is the variety of artworks that people can actually lay hands on and play with. These are interactive, enjoyable, and easily understandable exhibits, situated in light-filled spaces. It is a fluid "space" where all the elements interact-the architecture, artworks, display and interpretation, facility, staff, visitors, and environment.

The role of an art museum today is twofold: to have an economic impact on the city where it is located by gathering people in the broad sense, and to become a symbol of spiritual repose for them, i.e. a "drawing room" for the community's residents. It is essential for the museum staff to build good partnerships with the local community. I believe what brought nearly 1.6 million visitors to the museum is the fact that the people of neighboring restaurants and shops accepted coexistence, and together aimed at the realization of co-prosperity, with the new museum. The museum reenergized the city by mobilizing visitors.

According to the results of a survey by a university research institute regarding the economic impact of our museum, the total impact added up to ¥32.8 billion yen (approximately \$279 million), including the ¥21.7 billion for construction and ¥11.1 billion for museum management and visitors' expenditures. In line with our catch-phrase, "an art museum to change the city," we realized the tangible revitalization of the local economy.

I have long been an advocate of museums placing emphasis on cultivating the esthetic sensibility of people of all ages, gathering people, and enlivening the city. In addition to these, our museum has another important mission: "growing up with children." Let's go to the museum, and see the real objects there. This is the start. Our ability to persuade the local community that it is worth the money it takes to support the facility, and our enduring efforts to win the people's understanding, are the two essentials for the success of our museum.

Kanazawa is a middle-sized city located along the Japan Sea, with plenty of cultural assets. It attracts many visitors from Japan and abroad, with its beautiful historical districts spared from damage in World War II, and its highly developed arts and craft culture. Kanazawa has developed into a thoroughly charming modern city.

On October 9, 2004, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa was opened in the centre of Kanazawa, next to the Kenroku-Garden. It is just a few minutes on foot from the downtown area. The museum is now one of the most successful museums in Japan. This can be proven that in the second year after its opening, 2.75 million visitors from home and abroad, well beyond the number originally expected, have come to the museum. This is three times the total population of Kanazawa City while many museums in Japan are facing a hard time to survive due to financial difficulties.

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa is established with the aim of “revitalization of and through culture.” Being faced with a historical turning point in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, innovative city planning is necessary in our society. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, is to produce a new attraction in Kanazawa city and revitalize creative energy through cooperation. Here I would like to refer to our mission statements first.

1. To become a “living” museum with world contemporary arts; Our museum will allow the citizens of Kanazawa to witness and experience world's leading contemporary artistic expression. In this field, we can find various expression transcending time, borders, and genre-related boundaries. By experiencing such activities, the museum can create a bridge between the traditional arts of the region and future prospective artists.
2. To reinvigorate Kanazawa and its citizens. The museum is expected to become a new

“open space to the public” and a place for education, creation, entertainment and communication. The museum will work in cooperation with various groups, such as the citizens of Kanazawa and the industrial world to develop its unique original activities in the museum.

3. To connect traditional arts of the region and future prospective artists of the world. The museum will experiment how Kanazawa's distinctive cultural tradition influences the arts in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
4. To grow with children. The museum will provide the most suitable environment for children. It is an open classroom to “see,” “touch,” and to “experience.” As these children grow, our museum will grow together, improve and develop, for the next generations.

One of the main reasons for our attractiveness to visitors is the change of the museum's attitude from the traditional, paternalistic one of “showing works of art to people” to “reaching out to people with art.” A unique characteristic of this museum is the variety of artworks that people can actually lay hands on and play with. The museum is situated in the centre of the city, so anybody can drop in whenever they want. The museum is designed as a park where people can gather and meet with one another. The glass-made circle results in an ambiguous spatial definition, a kind of reversible membrane through which visitors can sense each other's presence. The museum pays careful attention to its openness and brightness from the courtyard with sky-lights. These are interactive, enjoyable, and easily understandable exhibits, situated in light-filled spaces. It is a fluid “space” where all the elements interact-the architecture, artworks, display and interpretation, facility, staff, visitors, and environment.

The role of an art museum today is twofold: to have an economic impact on the city where it is located by gathering people in

the broad sense, and to become a symbol of spiritual repose for them, i.e. a “drawing room” for the community's residents. It is essential for the museum staff to build good partnerships with the local community. I believe what brought nearly 2.8 million visitors to the museum is the fact that the people of neighboring restaurants and shops accepted coexistence, and together aimed at the realization of co-prosperity, with the new museum. The museum reenergized the city by mobilizing visitors. I gave over a hundred lectures in different communities explaining that this museum could really change the city since I was involved with this museum project. Now it is proven: “Museums can change a city.” However, I strongly believe that the community's support is vital to continue development of this museum.

According to the results of a survey by a university research institute regarding the economic impact of our museum, the total

impact added up to approximately 278 million US dollars, including the 184 million US dollars for construction and 94 million dollars for museum management and visitors' expenditures. In line with our catch-phrase, “an art museum to change the city,” we realized the tangible revitalization of the local economy.

I have long been an advocate of museums placing emphasis on cultivating the esthetic sensibility of people of all ages, gathering people, and enlivening the city. In addition to these, our museum has another important mission: “growing up with children.” Let's go to the museum, and see the real objects there. This is the start. Our ability to persuade the local community that it is worth the money it takes to support the facility, and our enduring efforts to win the people's understanding, are the two essentials for the success of our museum.

#### About the author

Dr. Yutaka Mino, Vice Chairman of Sotheby's North America, Chief Executive Director of Kanazawa 21<sup>st</sup> Century Museum of Contemporary Art, was born in Kanazawa, Japan, in 1941, and has received his Ph. D. in Art History at Harvard Univ. in 1977. He was associate curator of Asiatic Department at Montreal Museum of Fine Arts in 1976, curator of Oriental Art Department at the Indianapolis Museum of Art in 1977, and curator of Asian Department at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1985. After returning to Japan, he was appointed as director of the Osaka Municipal Museum of Art in 1996, Director of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Museum of Contemporary Art in 2004, and Deputy Mayor of Kanazawa City in 2005. Yutaka Mino has organized many exhibitions, and also published individual books and catalogs such as Hakuji (White Wares), vol. 5 in the Chugoku Toji (Chinese Ceramics) series in 1998 and The Radiance of Jade and Crystal Clarity of Water: Korean Ceramics from the Ataka Collections, 1991.

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Museum of Contemporary Art in Kanazawa, Japan is founded with a very special idea, which combines the building and the art works to one piece of design. Its fame of the architecture competes with its collections. And it presents a model for a 21<sup>st</sup> century art museum with a focus on two aspects. The first is the integration of the design of the museum space with the program. The result of the 4-year collaboration between museum staff and architect SANAA is a “device” that transcends its function as a museum space to provide information and programs offering a range of experiences to visitors, engineering their awareness.

20<sup>th</sup> century Modernism was driven by the three M's: Man, Money and Materialism. With the replacement of these three M's with the three C's: Consciousness, Collective intelligence and Co-existence, new forms of expression are now beginning to make their appearance. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa is an enormous catalytic “device”, the purpose of which is to convey the “psychological products” of these three C's to visitors, to ensure their effect and to revitalize everyone that comes into contact with the museum.

The second aspect is “the initiator” as transitional and coexistent. In the past, the curator as art specialist was the “initiator” in an art museum who determined the value of art and had the final decision on what to collect and was responsible for any other activities. Programs to encourage visitors to become initiators, and deconstructionist programs or programs focusing on destroying the perception of “self”, have been incorporated into 21<sup>st</sup> Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa's range of activities. If, as Beuys, said, “Everyone is an artist”, this

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museum dreams of a time when anyone can decide on what is of value and show works based on their own criteria, a time when anyone can become a curator. The resources of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa to become a “device” that can transcend a non-Western perspective focusing on values that are different from Western modernism, instead committing to a deep and strong involvement with society and the world at large while continuing to generate different values are about to be verified.