

Dialogue — Deeper and Further

Artist Statement

***Whitewash, Bleeding Red* 2023**

It surprises me when something I thought was inorganic suddenly changes how it appears, as if it is a living creature. To me, iron was one of those things. As a student, I was very much into fusing or welding works. However, rather than making my sculpture, I was more interested in seeing how iron changes the way it looks - such as the soft, slithery cross-section when it melts with heat, the surface of its rust that looks like a scab, and the splattering spark of fire. Moreover, the tools were in high temperatures and pressure, which put me at high risk - at the same time, it felt like I was in a trance when doing such work, and I did not remember my intense interactions with iron as if it were an illusion. All those experiences fascinated me with its erotic sentiment, like a red, burning body, that made me see iron as a form of body.

Living in the white, reinforced concrete apartment complex since childhood felt convenient, comfortable, and, above all else, reasonable. On the other hand, the repetition of these well-organized, inorganic, and clean boxes had a disquiet atmosphere. They seemed like frames that block the sense of touch or smell as a human being. I was hugely impacted by this environment as one of the residents, which gradually stripped off my physical mind and thoughts.

During the Meiji era, the government put enormous investments in the steel industry with the intent of accelerating the country's industrial modernization, which resulted in the operation of Yawata Steelworks (current Nippon Steel Corporation Kyushu Works Yawata Area) in Kitakyushu in 1901. As if a mirror reflected world affairs or changes through different periods of time, some sort of energy swirled around the place, constantly affecting people in the surrounding area.

When a huge scale of energy is produced on purpose, that energy is likely to accompany some pleasant words - such as "peace," "safety," "development," or "cleanliness." Those words somehow seem to evoke the image of "white color." This image not only gives people a sense of comfort but also prompts them to immerse themselves in white color, as if the architectural structure of the apartment complex utilizes white concretes to strengthen the red reinforcing steel. The color white(*shiro*), in its original meaning in Japanese, means "plain," the "state" of itself as a material not being mixed with another color. In other words, the moment when the color white is identified as "color," it contains some kind of a lie. However, because the color white holds its

exclusive character deriving from its purity, no one is encouraged to point that out.

I want to remind you of the phrase “*Iron is the State*” used by the Meiji government, which derives from the speech of Otto von Bismarck. What comes to mind when we replace the word “iron” with “body?” The iron stick which appears in the video is 50.3 cm long. By using this stick on a side to make a cubic object, it would become a mass of iron as heavy as 1 ton, which refers to the increasing number of work-related accidents in 1970 when the “4 team 3 shift system” was conducted under the slogan of systematization – the golden age of Nippon Steel Corporation. At that time, the amount of crude iron produced by one person per month was 23 tons, reportedly causing 23 deaths every month. This number proves the cruel fact that one died for a ton of iron produced each month*.

Similarly, the two poetry pieces read by a man in the video are excerpts from the magazine *Shiro*** , issued by the members of a club formed in an ironwork in 1966. Both works evoke the image of red in the human bodies forcibly made to become like machines, the bodies that got involved into an enormous power elaborated by the words embracing white.

This time, I was able to conduct a shoot at the very site of the iron production, with great thanks to *Nippon Steel Corporation Kyushu Works*. I was thrilled to see the unimaginably gigantic facilities exposing limitless energy while splatting heat and fire like a monster. To me it appeared exactly as the fundamental energy of the human body.

Since childhood, I was curious to know where do the state of being as if lacked senses or a sense of feeling that my head is prevented from thinking come from. This question that I kept asking myself is adjacent to the history of industrial modernization. I was painted and covered in white, or whitewashed by something, and did not even recognize the fact that my reasonable life existed because of someone’s suffering. The rust forms when the iron which already became standardized product tries to return to its original form as ore. I want to think of my future as if I would take back the red rust from my whitened body.

Yamamoto Seiko

* Excerpt from [Died out Landscape : In the depth of Capitalism in Japan] *Shini taeta fukei – nihon shihon shugi no shinsou kara* (in Japanese), KAMATA Satoshi, 1985.

** Magazine *Shiro*, issued by Shiro publishing company, 1966

This artwork is on view at Artist Cafe Fukuoka (2-5 Jōnai, Chuo-ku, Fukuoka) between Sep.16 and Sep. 24, 2023