アーティストとひらく
Opening Dialogues

TODA Sayaka: Blooms in Silence

戸田沙也加展「沈黙と花」

2025年6月28日 | 土 | – 11月3日 | 月・祝 |
June 28 – November 3, 2025



Foreword

“Opening Dialogues” is an annual program in which we join emerging artists in considering the future potential of art and museums, and facilitate trial-and-error efforts. In this exhibition, which marks the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II, the artist Toda Sayaka and the Yokohama Museum of Art will consider the issues of ongoing conflict and the potential for coexistence as unraveling the museum's collection.

After Hiroshima was reduced to ashes in the wake of the atomic bombing of the city in the summer of 1945, it was expected to remain barren of vegetation for the next 75 years. Yet, roughly one month later in September, a canna lily was found blooming quietly about 800 meters from the hypocenter of the atomic bomb.

The brilliant flower of the canna lily, indigenous to Latin America, blossoms among the plant's large leaves under the blazing midsummer sun. The Asahi Shimbun newspaper photographer Matsumoto Eiichi took a picture of the flower in Hiroshima. His photograph later became a symbol of hope at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum.

In 2021, at the height of the Covid pandemic, Toda began making works using the motifs of canna lilies and a friend who immigrated to Japan from Russia. These motifs inspired Toda to think about peace in Japan and “those who cross the sea from other lands to put down roots and live naturally in this island nation.”

In this exhibition, we focus on works by two painters from the Yokohama Museum of Art collection: Ogawara Shu and Joan Miró. Toda shows new works, which once again deal with the motifs of canna lilies and the artist's Russian friend. These are based on Toda's thoughts of Ogawara and Miró, two artists who continued to make art while remaining committed to their own positions and attitudes despite the trials and tribulations of war.

In closing, we would like to express our heartful gratitude to Ms. Toda Sayaka herself, and to all the individuals and organizations whose generous support made this exhibition.

Yokohama Museum of Art

On the Exhibition

Walking through night streets with a Russian friend during the pandemic in 2021, I photographed her alongside non-native plants and flowers as symbols of resilience—beings that had journeyed from distant lands and taken root in this soil. It was a year later that I would discover the profound historical burden carried by the canna flowers I had captured by chance, during a time when the word "war" began to permeate our daily conversations with increasing frequency.

The *Tokyo Canna Project*, photographic documentation of performances that emerged from deeply personal reflections starting in 2023, overlays the understanding that peace is not something given to us but something we must pursue, through the presence of canna flowers blooming with resilient vitality.

For this collaboration with Yokohama Museum of Art's collection, I selected works by Ogawara Shu and Joan Miró from among the museum's treasured holdings. Visiting Hiroshima, Okinawa, and Ogawara's hometown in Hokkaido to understand the historical context, and evoking the landscapes the artists of that era would have beheld, I found myself gradually overcome by a sensation of war approaching and becoming increasingly present in my daily reality, despite belonging to a generation that has never directly experienced war. This became a profound reawakening to how deeply past experiences remain woven into our present time. These realizations have remained with me throughout my artistic journey.

What does it truly mean for people of different nationalities, languages, and religions to live together? What are the foundations necessary for people to live together? May this exhibition become a small and humble prayer connecting past, present, and future that softly touches the hearts of those who encounter these works.

Toda Sayaka



Toda Sayaka, *Canna*, 2021, ink-jet print (set of 3)



Installation view









Toda Sayaka, *Recording Memories*, 2025, video (color, sound, 16 min.)

Ogawara Shu was born in 1911 in Kutchan Town, located in the particularly snow-laden regions of Hokkaido.

After advancing to Tokyo University of the Arts and graduating, he developed an interest in Surrealism and began pursuing his distinctive artistic expression. However, as the World War II regime intensified, regulations on artistic expression became increasingly severe, forcing him to withdraw works from exhibitions and sometimes paint over pieces while still in progress.

Ogawara was reflecting on his own circumstances while employing the contrasting words 'dialogue' and 'silence' respectively before and after World War II. The word 'dialogue' appears repeatedly in the titles of his prewar works, including *Dialogue of Twins* from Yokohama Museum of Art's collection.

After World War II, he returned to Kutchan Town and continued producing works using animals such as horses and dogs, and natural subjects as motifs. Ogawara called this period his "age of silence," which suggests how difficult genuine dialogue with others had become.

In *Dialogue of Twins*, the background behind the gazing twins depicts Iwaonupuri, a mountain visible from Kutchan Town. Against the backdrop of Iwaonupuri rising majestically into the blue sky, what might the twins be saying to each other?

Born as a twin myself, I produced a video work for this collaboration that explores 'dialogue' with my sister while contemplating Ogawara's state of mind as he oscillated between dialogue and silence. (Artist)



Left: Ogawara Shu, *Dialogue of Twins*, 1940, oil on canvas Right: Toda Sayaka, *Story of Twins*, 2025, video (color, sound, 3 min.)



Toda Sayaka, *Story of Twins*, 2025, video (color, sound, 3 min.)

Joan Miró's *Flowers and Butterfly*, one of Yokohama Museum of Art's representative works, depicts butterflies, hibiscus arranged in a vase, branches, and yellow canna flowers adorned with vibrant leaves.

Around 1920, Miró painted plants and landscapes in his native Catalan village of Montroig with meticulous detail and symbolic expression. Living alongside nature, he carefully observed and depicted leaf veins and butterfly patterns. In this meticulous attention, what might be termed obsessive, I sense Miró's reverence for nature and deep affection for the Catalan landscape.

Following the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, Miró was forced into exile both within Spain and abroad. Despite facing various forms of oppression, he continued to express his yearning for freedom through his art. Through this collaboration, I have also found myself reflecting anew on the profound significance of 'continuing to hold one's homeland in one's heart,' even while being tossed about and torn by conflicting forces.

The place where I first photographed canna flowers with my friend in 2021 was Yokohama. Now, I sense a mysterious convergence of fate that *Flowers and Butterfly*, in which canna flowers are depicted, has been housed in Yokohama Museum of Art. (Artist)



Installation view



Toda Sayaka, *Blooms in Silence*, 2025, oil on canvas



Toda Sayaka, *Tokyo Canna Project #1*, 2023, ink-jet print



Toda Sayaka, *Tokyo Canna Project #29*, 2025, ink-jet print



Toda Sayaka, *Tokyo Canna Project #24*, 2025, ink-jet print



Installation view

In the Hope That a Lonely One-person Demonstration Might Strike a Chord with Someone

Osawa Sayoko (Curator, Yokohama Museum of Art)

Toda Sayaka was born in Kawagoe, Saitama Prefecture in 1988. When Toda was about to take her university entrance exams, she decided to switch from music – a subject she had been familiar with for many years – to art. She became a major in painting at the Joshibi University of Art and Design. After enrolling in the school, she began making works based on the motif of “girls and wolves.” With the exception of her father, most of Toda's close relatives were women. She also chose to stay at women's schools for an extended period. Based on these experiences, Toda developed a deep interest in subjects such as masculinity within femininity, the ambiguity of female beauty and ugliness, and skepticism regarding traditional images of women.

After completing a master's degree at the university, Toda began working to make ends meet, and met a partner of the opposite sex. In the process, she came to realize that men are deeply vulnerable, despite the fear and powerlessness that women feel in Japan's still male-dominated society. This led to a roughly eight-year period during which Toda was plagued by doubts about her art.

Finally, in 2021, she began showing her work again. At that point, someone commented on the distinctive qualities of her photographs, which she had been taking at the same time that she was painting, and she discovered the canna lily motif, an important part of this exhibition, and became friends with a Russian.

Those Who Come from Elsewhere

Toda's work was inspired by the idea that some people and things that “cross the sea from other lands to put down roots and live naturally in this island nation.” Some of them are visible in *Canna* (p. 3-4), a work in which Toda's friend is shown embracing canna lilies.

These photographs were taken after Toda and her friend happened to find some of the flowers in Yamashita Park in Yokohama during the Covid epidemic in 2021. At the time, no direct military confrontation had occurred between Russia and Ukraine, and Toda was unaware of the history of canna lilies in postwar Japan. The following year Toda learned more about the flower while researching non-native plant species in Hiroshima. By that time, there were constant reports on TV and the net about the war between Russia and Ukraine.

Having watched the significance of this work change so rapidly, Toda drew on this experience to consider people from abroad, and the societies and governments that surrounded them.

Recording Memories

The video *Recording Memories* (p. 3-4) was the first piece that Toda intentionally made in which she and her Russian friend, who had previously been a motif in her work, were both subjects.

In this work, her friend displays some family photographs that she and her father took, and begins to share some of her childhood memories of spending time in the Ural Mountains. Next, Toda recalls the day when the two first met, and they reenact a scene in which they eat cake and chat together. Toda also appears in some footage shot by her friend. This marks the first time that the artist has incorporated the focus of someone other than herself in her work.

As they leave the hotel and head for the park, the two of them move the backs and palms of their hands closer and farther away from each other until eventually they join hands and walk into the park. This scene, in which the two simply move their hands in silence, is the most memorable part of the work. It seems to convey the hope that even if they are separated at some point in the future, they will make every effort to meet and connect again, and reestablish their relationship.

Ultimately, all of us are at the mercy of social and political conditions, and in some cases, we are torn apart. At the same time, personal connections sometimes give us the strength to overcome such conditions based on our own will and desire.

Tokyo Canna Project

This year, 2025, marks the 80th anniversary of Japan's defeat in World War II. How many people now living experienced the war? According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, approximately 10.7 percent of Japan's total population is 81 or older (as of October 1, 2024). In other words, everyone who survived the war and worked to create peace in the country based on their experiences and reflections will soon be gone. When that day comes, how will we see peace? Toda's *Tokyo Canna Project* (p. 9-10), in which she placed canna lilies around the city of Tokyo, takes the form of a “humble demonstration.” It grew out of the artist's sense of urgency regarding the future of peace.

After shooting some pictures in 2023, Toda searched for a place to continue this performance. These photographs, taken in Okinawa and Yokohama, have been newly added to the work. In Okinawa, rather than placing flowers in the city, Toda chose to shoot some canna lilies that were growing there naturally. In Yokohama, she placed some flowers around the museum and Yamashita Park.

How many people have learned about the history of canna lilies through Toda's work? Once you see the work, you realize that there are actually many more of the flowers around people's houses and in city planters than you thought. Having crossed the ocean and ending up in Japan, the canna lily, which only blooms in midsummer, is imbued with a special meaning. Every time we see one in town, we start to reflect a little on peace, history, and people and things from other places. With this humble demonstration, Toda hopes that as many people as possible will bring this feeling back with them into their daily life.

Biography



Toda Sayaka

1988 Born in Saitama, Japan.
2012 Completed an M.F.A. in Painting at Joshibi University of Art and Design, Graduate School of Art and Design, Fine Arts Course.
Lives and works in Ibaraki prefecture and Tokyo.

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2024 “TOKAS-Emerging 2024 - Echoes of the Unspoken: The Silent Voices of the Vanishing,” Tokyo Arts and Space Hongo, Tokyo
2024 “Adding Canna Flowers to Tokyo,” KANA KAWANISHI PHOTOGRAPHY, Tokyo
2025 “Voice of Silence,” KYOTO MUSEUM OF PHOTOGRAPHY Gallery Japanesque, Kyoto

Selected Group Exhibitions

2020 “SONO AIDA #COVID-19,” Online Exhibition https://sonoaida.jp/sonoaida_covid-19
2023 “Boundary texture,” gallery cafe ULTRA, Hiroshima
2025 “Deconstructive Decoration,” Paichu Gallery, Tokyo

Awards

2010 “Shell Art Award” Selected
2010 “Art Award Tokyo Marunouchi 2010” Kazue Kobata Prize

List of Works

Toda Sayaka, *Canna*, 2021, ink-jet print (set of 3), each 103×72.8 cm
Toda Sayaka, *Recording Memories*, 2025, video (color, sound, 16 min.)
Toda Sayaka, *Story of Twins*, 2025, video (color, sound, 3 min.)
Toda Sayaka, *Tokyo Canna Project (Tokyo, Yokohama, Okinawa)*, 2023-25, ink-jet print (10 pieces), 80.2×120 cm, 120×80 cm, 77.9×51.5 cm, 42×64.4 cm, 42×63.5 cm, 29.7×45.3 cm, 29.7×45 cm, 29.7×45.5 cm, 29.7×45 cm, 78.1×51.5 cm
Toda Sayaka, *Blooms in Silence*, 2025, oil on canvas, 270×160 cm
*Above are collections of the Artist

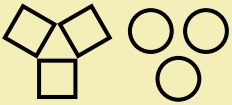
Ogawara Shu, *Flowers in Desert*, 1937, oil on canvas, 36.3×44 cm, Yokohama Museum of Art (Gift of Mr. Ogawara Shu)
Ogawara Shu, *Scores of Plants*, 1937, oil on canvas, 38×45.8 cm, Yokohama Museum of Art (Gift of Mr. Ogawara Shu)
Ogawara Shu, *Dialogue of Twins*, 1940, oil on canvas, 162×130.3 cm, Yokohama Museum of Art
Joan Miró, *Flowers and Butterfly*, 1922-23, tempera on board, 81×65 cm, Yokohama Museum of Art

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Dates: June 28 – November 3, 2025
Venue: Gallery 5, Yokohama Museum of Art
Organized by Yokohama Museum of Art
Grant from NOMURA 野村財団

First edition: November 30, 2025
Edited by Yokohama Museum of Art
Design: Imamura Keisuke
Translation: Matsuzaki Yoshiteru (Exhibition title and p. 2, 5, 7)
Christopher Stephens (p. 1, 11-12)
Photo: Omote Nobutada
Published by Yokohama Museum of Art
3-4-1 Minatomirai, Nishi-ku, Yokohama 220-0012, Japan
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