
COMMENTARIES and ARTIST'S WORDS

chapter 1

4 Foxtail, 1964

--Before starting to create, look closely. In so doing, you will come to realize how vaguely we tend to see things. You will encounter the unexpected and be surprised. It is how you truly get to know something.

6 Octopus, 1965

Ayako Miyawaki's creative process begins with what she finds "beautiful" and "interesting." Behind this is her inquisitive mind and curiosity. She created this work while thinking, "The shape of octopus is interesting."

9 Sketchbook: Evening-Primrose Buds, c.1966

Miyawaki was a patient observer who wrote, "I observe a single flower. Watching it change from moment to moment gives me an indescribable pleasure". She spent a long time observing the buds of an evening primrose flower as they swell.

14 "Hinona" Turnips, 1970

In appliqué, which is expressed by cutting the cloth into the shape of a motif, it is difficult to represent details, and the artist has no choice but to omit the details. Compared to painting, which can be expressed in any way with a brush, appliqué is perhaps the most inferior. It is not suited for realistic expression. To compensate for this disadvantage, Miyawaki makes various efforts. For example, by using strings and threads to broaden the range of expression, and by layering and pasting fabrics and materials, Miyawaki tries to achieve a realistic expression that is as good as a painting. In this work, the layered fabrics show subtle changes in the color of the leaves, and the netting used to depict the veins of the leaves shows her ingenuity. Needless to say, the act of looking at things closely was at the root of these expressions.

chapter 2

24 Onion Halved, 1978

--I was drawn and amused by the cross section of the onion sprouts when I cut them lengthwise.

As I was making the work, the gaps inside appeared and it became more interesting, at the same time I was impressed by their vigor.

26 Snails, 1967

--We caught a snail and let it walk on a flat area, climb up, or walk on a narrow area for half a day to observe and sketch its various forms.

35 Gourd Couple, 1975

Miyawaki offers the following tips for creating appliqués: "Before starting to create, look closely. In so doing, you will come to realize how vaguely we tend to see things. You will encounter the unexpected and be surprised. It is how you truly get to know something." In the 13th volume of *Harie Nikki (Appliqué Diary)*, she also wrote down Tolstoy's words, "To move the hearts of others / the artist must be an inquirer / if the author inquires / those who see, hear, and read will inquire with the author." Miyawaki was an artist full of inquisitiveness, and whenever she did not understand something, she would immediately look it up. This inquisitive mind encouraged her to look closely and make observations, which led her to the expression of the front and back of fish and birds, and the cross sections of fruits and vegetables.

38 Flatfish(underside), 1977

--The front side of the Flatfish is dark brown and the back side is whitish.

As I stared at the back side, I learned that it has a different beauty from the front side.

chapter 3

45 Fiddleheads, 1957

--I lined up fiddleheads and brackens.

No two things that God has created are the same.

It is a mystery of nature.

50 "Tōgarashi" Peppers, 1963

--I found these at a grocery store in Akita Prefecture when I traveled to the Tohoku region.

I was drawn to it by its bright colors and the interesting way it was bundled, so I immediately bought it.

I was impressed by the aesthetic sense of the farmer who came up with this idea from his daily life.

54 Anemones, 1969

--These are my favorite flowers. Next to the red and white, I have arranged purple, yellow, and blue, not the actual colors, but the colors I like. The backdrop is an old mosquito net.

The fabrics used are all cotton.

60 Coffee-Filter "Squid", 1985

This work was created by "just a little use of scissors" on a cloth coffee filter in an attempt to emulate the simplicity of Enku's Buddha statues. While minimizing artifice, the work beautifully expresses diversity.

chapter 4

67 Bento Box "Onion Buds", 1970

Coarse string is rolled up to form a green onion buds, and a wooden bento lunch box is cleaved to represent the stem. The wild vitality of the leeks growing in the field can be felt in this work.

70 Leather "Squid", 1972

--Deerskin is the perfect material to express dried squid.

I used it because it has the perfect color and texture.

71 Dried Sardines, 1975

--Made from used oil stove wicks.

I always believe that nothing in this world is waste.

79 Fallen Camellias

Several camellia flowers have fallen on top of a messy layer of dead grass that appears to be Japanese pampas grass. Perhaps to express the cruelty of the fallen camellias, the petals appear to have been intentionally stained or smudged.

80 Dried Flatfish, 1986

Used coffee filters were also an important material. The coffee stain is well utilized to express dried fish. The base cloth is an old judo uniform.

81 Greater Burdock ("gobō"), 1986

--Received a freshly dug, large, magnificent burdock from E-san.

The burdock is made of an old sake bag. The leaves are indigo dyed stencil from the Edo period.

chapter 5

82 Stonefish, 1957

The pattern of the stonefish is a dragon, but it cannot be distinguished at first glance. The dragon with its claws up in the air is a perfect example of the stinging nature of stonefish.

84 Tropical Fish, 1969

--An old family gave us crepe de Chine and tie-dye from the Edo period.

I made the work with a deep sense of the goodness of old things.

86 Pineapple

For the leaves, the artist pursues realism by layering fabrics of subtly different tones. On the other hand, for the fruit, the artist boldly uses a chintz-like cloth with a flora and fauna pattern, but the pattern and motif blend so well that one might think that it has been rendered in a realistic manner.

87 Chinese Cabbage, 1975

--In Japan, each of the four seasons has its own joys. There are things to eat and see that can only be experienced in winter.

90 Bamboo Shoots, 1978

Bamboo shoots are one of Miyawaki's favorite motifs, and she uses them repeatedly in her works. The way the skin rolls around is skillfully expressed by the use of the mark of a *shirushi-banten* (livery with trademark).

95 Dried Spanish Mackerel, 1986

--When I tried using stripes for the backing cloth and the fish, I realized that straight lines have a very strong power.

chapter 6

99 Sketchbook: Flowering branch

Several types of flowers were cut out according to their outlines to create a flower with many blooming flowers. The same stem has different kinds of flowers, making it a hybrid plant that does not exist in reality.

106 Sea Bream with Crane and Turtle Design, 1979

This piece was modeled on a sea bream that was given to the artist as a congratulatory gift, and was made using indigo-dyed patterns of crane and turtle. The connection between those two auspicious animals and the sea bream makes sense, but the sudden appearance of a crane-and-turtle pattern in a fish shape is a surprise. This kind of freethinking is the essence of Miyawaki's work.

107 Salmon Slices and Arrowhead Bulbs, 1980

At first, eight slices of salmon fillets were prepared, but halfway through the process, it was changed to five slices when it was felt that it was too much. The remaining three slices were used for the *Harie Nikki (Appliqué Diary)*. The pattern of flowers and butterflies scatters on a salmon slices, but it does not look strange at all.

109 Red Crab, 1981

--I was fascinated by the interesting way in which the pattern of the fabric produced unexpected effects in unexpected places, and I finished this piece all at once.

When the model, the fabric, and my feelings become as one, it is the greatest joy.

chapter 7

123 Snake Gourds, 1983

--Snake gourds, which remind me of late autumn, are my favorite vines.

I gently placed it in a glass jug because I was amused by the way the leaves had withered and the red gourd and the faded gourd were lined up side by side.

124 "Oh, It's My Grandpa!", 1985

--When I casually put eyes and a nose with a gold string used for a cake box, my grandson, who came to visit, saw it and said, "Oh, it's grandpa!"

126 Filefish, 1985

The artist says that this work was created with the sudden idea of "trying it without color." The outline of the fish is represented by strings, and the work is composed in brownish monotone.

129 Sprouted Sweet Potatoes, 1987

Miyawaki was interested in the way sprouts and roots of plants grew. She would leave potatoes that had inadvertently sprouted in a corner of the kitchen for a while and observe them, and she would record the vigorous growth of the roots and stems of cut leeks and other plants arranged in a dish of water. Potatoes, sweet potatoes, and onions are sometimes left to sprout and grow, making them inedible, but she is not bothered at all. The growing buds and roots are a symbol of vitality. Perhaps Miyawaki was trying to express the radiance of life.

chapter 8

132 Folding Screen with Green Pepper Cross-Section Design, 1960

--I cut green peppers horizontally, which was interesting, and while cutting and arranging some of them, I thought it could be something good, so I used alternating primary colors on an indigo background to create a patterned look.

134 Folding Screen with Tilefish Design, 1961

The appliqué technique is not suitable for realistic expression because of the process of cropping, but on the other hand, the elimination of details leads to an understanding of the essential form. Of course, this requires thorough observation. A novice who is not very careful will only obtain poor results, but a careful observer will be able to accurately isolate the most essential form. It goes without saying that Miyawaki is the latter. Henri Matisse was able to create beautiful forms that captured the essence of his subjects by using the cutout technique in his later years, when it became difficult to paint. It can be said that what Miyawaki was trying to do was the same thing. In this work, she boldly pushed forward with simplification, and the forms of the tilefish were considerably abstracted, but even so, no two forms are identical. This is the result of her pursuit of the essential form of each tilefish.

142 Sketchbook: Woodcutting Tools, 1968

In each sketch, the outlines of the tools are captured with unwavering lines. The lines are full of the conviction that the artist has seen through the subject.

143 Woodcutting Tools, 1969

Miyawaki was fascinated by tools. The functional beauty of tools must have captured her heart. Whenever she encountered a beautiful tool in town or on a trip, she would leave a written or sketched record of her admiration, and sometimes she would purchase the tools in bulk. Sometimes she would buy them all at once, and then sublimate them into a work of art by arranging them in an exquisite balance. This work is a typical example. While the silhouettes of saws, machetes, axes, and other tools are boldly composed, the details are also carefully crafted. At first glance, the motifs seem to have been arranged in a haphazard manner, but the slightest movement of any motif could suddenly disrupt the equilibrium and the sense of tension of the picture plane. The snail, which slightly relaxes the tension, is admirable.

146 "Tokoyama" Hairdressing Combs

In this work, simple tools that embody the "beauty of use" are arranged in perfect balance to achieve a superior design. Since the combs are all real, it would no longer be appropriate to call them "appliqués," although it would be a stretch to call them "readymades." Nevertheless, the fact that she presents an existing object and makes it into a work of art is common to the methodology of readymades and other contemporary art forms. It can be said that this piece embodies her aesthetic sense with a minimum of artifice.

149 Anglerfish, 1975

--Anglerfish are grotesque fish by nature, but wrapping them by sense of humor and playfulness, without being bound by form, turned out to look like.

152 Striped Fish Patterns, 1967-83

153 Striped Dried Persimmon Patterns on Cotton, 1968-80

The 22-volume *Striped Fish Patterns* and the 15-volume *Striped Dried Persimmon Patterns on Cotton*, some of which are shown here, are among the most surprising of Miyawaki's works. Each of them has 10,000 fish and dried persimmons pasted on it. There are many other works in which many of the same motifs are pasted on. There is another book in which 10,000 dried persimmons are pasted on. Whenever she had new fabric, she would cut out small fish and dried persimmons one by one, and when she had collected a certain number of them, she pasted them into a picture book. In terms of the steady accumulation of work over a period of years, this is a feat comparable to the *Harie Nikki (Appliqué Diary)*, which was produced over a period of 19 years in a total of 70 volumes. These works seem to symbolize Miyawaki's life itself, as she continued to work diligently through her everyday life.