

ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

As “the source of art” to be symbolically exemplified by Ukiyo-e, Mt. Fuji has been registered as the World Cultural Heritage Site. At the foot of Mt. Fuji, at Kawaguchiko town in Yamanashi prefecture, there are international artists learning Mokuhanga. Called as “the Mecca of printmaking” by one of the participating artists, the view of Mt. Fuji is in great respect, as is evident in Hokusai’s and Hiroshige’s expression. Being inspired by Mt. Fuji, the artists are tackling to develop their works.

Mokuhanga Innovation Laboratory, a nongovernment art organisation run by Keiko Kadota has developed this project since last year. Currently, artists from the U.S, Germany, Canada, Estonia and Singapore who have worked with printmaking and watercolour painting learn Japanese mokuhanga techniques in order to further develop their work, for a month, at the residential workshop, the renovated building which used to be a guesthouse in Katsuyama town.

The work of Japanese multicoloured printing such as Hokusai’s “The Thirty-six View of Mount Fuji” or that of Hiroshige’s is highly respected in terms of its techniques and subtlety in expression. The workshop teaches how to sharpen knives as well the technique of carving and printing taught by the master practitioners.

“How can I make Bokashi effectively?”, the question was raised by one of the artists on the first day. Brian Curling from Germany revealed his enthusiasm as “Mt. Fuji can be regarded as the Mecca of mokuhanga as has been depicted in many prints.” The second day of his arrival in Japan, Mt. Fuji was officially registered as World Heritage Site. He says, “It surprises me that Mt. Fuji had not been the Heritage Site before... I think that the harmony between Mt. Fuji and the palette of colours in the surrounding landscape generates such a beauty in prints. I would like to experience that.”

Florence Neal from the U.S. also revealed her enthusiasm by saying “Mokuhanga has the significant depth in its medium. There is a distinctive meaning for me to work at the foot of Mt. Fuji. I would like to try to interpret traditional techniques in contemporary art through my expression.”

UNESCO claimed at the resolution that Ukiyo-e prints that depicted Mt. Fuji “have brought the significant influence upon the western art.” Kadota says “By introducing Japanese traditional techniques to international artists, I would like them to enrich the variety of expression. At the same time, I hope this project will facilitate the revival of Japanese traditional culture that has been in serious threat particularly due to the lack of young successors.”

Written by Tomohiro Katahira