Interviewee: Miwa san

Date and location: 11 March 2019, 2pm

Q: Interviewer A: Interviewee

Q: Could she tell me what kind of art she is doing now?

A: Her concept is having one drawing in each house, she wants everybody to have one drawing in their house. She draws like this way; it is called abstract... it is not about exact thing...in acrylic painting. Those are her work, but her work is about design. As an artist, she does what she said right now, but she is working as a designer for her job. It is kind of like...what she told you now, having one drawing in one house and doing abstract painting, it is her art as an artist. But as a product, she is doing a designer job, she is separating them.

Q: I see. Maybe we can talk about the art side first. When does she have the idea of having one painting in everyone’s house?

A: In ordinary houses around, there are actually not people having drawing in their house and having time to see those art and feel the art from the drawing, that’s why she came to this idea. Maybe some rich people will have a large painting in their house, but not like ordinary people, especially in countryside. In Japanese culture, we have all the 掛幅 in our house. It is a drawing of traditional painting style, there is always one in tea ceremony. It can be drawing or writing too. Maybe in Japanese culture, we have a similar concept, but not a painting like this. Nowadays, not many people have 掛幅 at home, they just hang a calendar there.

Q: Does her idea come from this aspect of traditional Japanese culture?

A: No, not really. She just thinks that people lack a painting in their house, maybe one painting in a house might make the life of people rich and more mental spaces to feel... Japanese is always busy...

Q: How is she fulfilling the concept now?

A: She just wants people to try having one drawing in a house, she doesn’t make a huge one, so it is easy for people to hang it around. This is becoming her style now as an artist, this does not communicate her opinion, she is not trying to communicate what she thinks and what she feels through the art. She is just trying to draw the painting that people can easily accept or easier for them to have it in their house. Sometimes, some artists just communicate their feelings and opinion, even their political opinion through their art. Sometimes, it can be really heavy and having so much power in it, some people might like it, but that would not be easy to put it in the house of other people. She is trying to make it easier to hang it around, that’s her concept.

Q: Like the topic of the drawing, where does it come from?

A: It’s about her image of the lighting of winter, it is very abstract. Maybe some people think that it is the farm with blue sky, that is okay for her. Her inspiration comes from what she thinks it’s beautiful. She gets the inspirations from what she thinks is beauty or beautiful, she just got the shapes and colors in her style, that’s her style.

Q: what about the designer part? What is she doing now?

A: She used to be married, that’s the opportunity that she had to start as a designer. At that time, the family of her ex-husband was selling rice, her designer friend just told her that you could draw something better, that was the beginning how she started designing something related to farming. It looked really cool that some people wanted her to make labels for them too. She was actually a farmer herself too, she experienced that if the package looks good, the sales would increase. That’s her... that became she thinks what she could do between the consumers and the farmers, this is what she is doing right now too. This is Kita san’s project. It actually does not matter if they are doing it in organic, alternative way or mainstream way, she is just trying to communicate what they want to communicate to her consumers, that’s her job. There are a variety of people who is practicing different ways of farming, she tried not to care, she does not want to choose what she likes or not. She does not really pick...based on the farming approach, she just takes everything she can take. Maybe some of her customers are doing strictly alternative way, but some are not. All of them are her customers, they are all the same.

Q: Could she tell me more about how she communicated with the farmers?

A: She made meetings with farmers and tried to know them better, it is not about how they farm but who he is, what he likes and what and how he thinks, something like personality, this is what she would do in the first meeting.

Q: What kind of questions would she ask in the meeting to know more about the person?

A: She just started from ordinary talking, for example, if she tries to interview me, she would ask me what is my favorite thing to do, something like that, then she will ask follow-up questions to know deeper about the person. She did not really prepare for the questions, she just tried to talk to the person, in the end, it became understanding the person. That's the way she made the interview, that's the way she got all the information and personality for designing for the customer.

Q: Can she use the example of Kita san to illustrate how she did it? She doesn't have to share with me the personal information of Kita san but just how she did it with her.

A: Her basic order is that she wanted to communicate with foreigners as well, so she needed to have English on it. She likes that Kita san loves to eat, through listening to Kita san's story, she just came to the idea that Kita san loves to eat, that's the core part of what she is doing. From that point, she started to farm, she was interested in synecoculture, the start is that Kita san loves to eat. So she came to the idea to have a background looks like forest country, something unlike Japanese, that's from the impressions she got from Kita san, then it became like this. Looking at Kita san's personality, she is not like so itchy, she has strong opinion but she doesn't show that part of her. She thinks that it might match with her to use color like this, not so itchy. She does it like that, based on Kita san's image and personality. What she does is more like, she is not good at choosing the right word to explain all the things that she is doing, it's more like the spirit and the feeling that she is getting from the person, and she just tried to communicate that by her ways, her skills and ability of drawing, the image of color and designing. It is really hard to explain by words, that's her role to communicate their personality, spirits and opinion through the drawings using color.

Q: She wants to visualize the personality of the farmers through her drawing?

T: That's not what she wanted to, but because of their orders, they asked for something and she thinks that what they asked for came from their personality.

Q: For example, Kita san gave her an order of drawing a leaflet for the workshop, but Kita san did not ask her to express her personality through the drawing. This is instead her way of doing it?

A: Yes.

Q: How about the farming part? She started with knowing the personality, what about the farming part?

T: When we asked her about the interviews, she just told me that she doesn't start from farming, it doesn't matter. It's really their personality that she takes as the most important thing.

Q: Yea, I mean is it just about the personality, does she also take into account their farming?

A: Yes, she also got the ideas from the farmers about what is really important to them in their farming, all the things...but not just the farming part.

Q: Yea...she also cares about their personality...

T: Yes, that's really important for her for the drawing.

A: When she listened to their farming values or ideas, she tried to help them to identify the good part...

Q: She also wrote the texts for them?

A: She did not think about the texts for them, but she just gave farmers the ideas that maybe they should communicate the important things about their farming, or what they think is important as their role. She gave them advice on what would communicate well, or this sentence looks good and the farmers themselves wrote the sentences. She thinks that maybe it is better to let the consumers to get all the ideas of what the farmer is doing and thinking. Also, it is not her role to make the texts, she is not write, she is the painter, so she is clear about it.

Q: Is it like she would ask the farmer what is the important message that you want to tell people?

T: What she told me is that she made interviews with the farmers, they are talking about many good things about their farming, but they don't realize it. It's just like people living in the countryside, it is just so normal about what they do, they just don't realize that it is really special, that's her part to point it out. Maybe it is a special part about your products or your crops, you should communicate this point to the consumers.

Q: Why she wanted to use the method of knowing the person first?

A: It's hard...She gave an example that maybe you cannot give a good gift to somebody who you don't know. It is like that, so her job is to communicate the farmer to the consumers. She is in between the farmer and consumers; her job is to help them communicate well. So, in this way, she has to know better about the farmer, otherwise she cannot communicate the farmer to the others. That's why she wanted to know better about the farmers.

Q: Are there any positive experiences through cooperating with farmers as a designer?

A: She was not born in a farming family, she is always interested in knowing how the farming products come from, through her job she got to know how it is made and processed, that's really interesting and good things for her to know where it comes from. She said it is simple, maybe too simple.

Q: For the process of how the food comes from, does it mean how it is grown, or how it is processed? What does she mean by how the food comes from?

A: It is not like she wants to know the very detailed parts, maybe how it was grown, how the farmer worked on it, it is not the details she wants to know, but the whole process from farming to becoming a product delivered to the consumer, she got to know these from the interviews, and she loves to know these.

Q: Are there any challenges?

A: There was a guy that gave her writings about what he wanted to communicate, this was for her to draw the painting, but to her the writing did not really match with the person, so the image did not come up. She got done with the job, her client is a woman, she thought about why it did not go so well, she came up the idea that the farmer herself did not know who she wanted to be, so it was like a mess. She learnt from this experience that she needs to know the real concept of what her client wants to do or wants to be through making the product, she learnt it from that experience, it happened in the beginning of her career.

Q: In the beginning, she mentioned that she separates art and design. Does she see the drawing in her design as art?

A: She doesn't think so deeply, as a drawing, maybe it is art, but it is more like ... advertisement. She has clients on those paintings, the pieces are art, but still as a job, it is more like designer than being artist.

Q: Does she think that helping the customers to design their products also inform her art practices? Also change and bring some new ideas to her practices?

A: It is a two-way process to her, she got inspirations from both. Drawing art pieces and designing products, both works inspire each other on techniques and skills.

Q: What about ideas about art concept?

A: About her art, she has the concept that it should be easily understandable by people, it does not communicate too much of her own opinion. But as a designer, she tried different things inside her, it could be so different from what she wanna draw, her techniques, what she likes to use her techniques maybe so different, but she tried not to make only one way or certain ways to communicate that information.

Q: In design, she can more express herself?

A: No, she tried not to only focus on certain ways to communicate. She wants to adjust herself to the client, she tried not to have her own style, she tried to have a variety of style for the drawing.

Q: Could she use some examples from her design work to show me?

A: She helped Mr. Burger's artwork. You can see the differences, Mr. Burger asked her to draw this image to communicate with the customers, that's such a different taste to her. She can use her ability of drawing in any ways, she tried to take those. That's a famous accommodation in Tokamachi, the CEO of the accommodation is so famous, this is used for their event's menu. This is for hair salon, that's a different texture. That's her style to do the art pieces, but she tried to use her styles in any ways when she is asked as a designer.

Q: What are the feedbacks from farmers after she used the drawings to help them?

A: She got some feedbacks from farmers that what she designed for them got good reputations from customers. Like this cake shop, the husband is a farmer, her wife is using the vegetables to make those sweets. They turn their house into a shop in Spring, right now they are a small store at the skiing resort other than their own house, but they are still doing their business. This is their rice that she also drawn, she got a lot of good feedback from them.

Q: She mentioned that she would also help the farmers to spot the good part in their farming, does she think that it also helps the farmers to know more about their own farming and the things that are meaningful in their farming?

A: Yes, definitely. Because as a farmer, they don't really realize what they are doing, it is too normal for them. They cannot see themselves as someone outside of themselves, they cannot see themselves so well. That's her job to let them know about it and communicate that to the consumers through their products.

Q: Does she have any plan to further connect art, design, or the drawing to farming?

A: It is not only on farming, she thinks that it is her role, or maybe what she loves to do, is to communicate one's opinion to someone else. She loves farmers and she respects farmers so much, this is because they are doing something she cannot do, especially like...they have to work under any conditions of the weather, or seasons, it does not stay the same each year, it is so different every year, it is impossible to control the weather but they just do their jobs under those conditions. That's something she can never do, she can control all the drawings and paintings in what she does, it is not affected by anything else, but farming is so much affected by the weather which you cannot control, that's something she really respects about farmers. They are doing something she cannot do, that's why she loves farmers. She is almost giving up being a wife of a farmer, but she still has a dream like that.

Q: Before she married the farmer, she was already working as a designer?

A: Her career was so different, she was painting kimono before she got married, she barely had done any design job before but she just started when she got the opportunity after the marriage.