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# EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH IKEDA MANABU

These pen-and-ink on paper paintings by Japanese artist Ikeda Manabu personify a complicated world. They are enormous, especially when considering the amount of detail involved. Each painting takes two years of eight-hour days to complete. He builds the images in blocks; usually one four-inch block a day. Manabu doesn't know what they will look like until they are finished

*History of Rise and Fall* is a 6.5 by 6.5 foot painting that displays ancient Japanese housing, Samurai armies, Korean war planes and cherry blossoms that swirl into scenes within scenes. In 2008, Manabu painted *Foretoken*, a 6 by 11 foot intricately merciless tsunami swallowing trains, boats, buildings and all things human that explode in a syncopated dance of destruction. Although *Foretoken* was globally admired, in Japan, after the 2011 Great East Earthquake, it was considered prophetic. Earlier this year, Manabu's latest painting, *Meltdown* directly addressed the 2011 earthquake in a show of the same name, at Vancouver Art Gallery. He recently came to Japan for a couple of weeks before heading off to states to start work on his next project. He took time out of his hectic schedule for an interview with Hi-Fructose. Manabu's answers were translated from Japanese.

## What are you currently working on?

I will be starting a drawing in Madison, Wisconsin, on a 10 by 13 foot panel in July. It'll take me 3 years to finish. The theme is disaster to recovery.

## How will your US show be different from the Vancouver, Canada show you did earlier this year?

Only *Meltdown* was shown in Vancouver. In Madison, the purpose of this show is to introduce myself. My previous works will also be exhibited.

## How do you think your show will be received in the US by comparison?

Hmm, I cannot tell until it actually starts, but a lot of audiences will be introduced to my work for the first time. I am looking forward to their response.

## What's your process when it comes to creating an image? For example, do you ever sketch out the drawing before you ink it?

I try to daily sketch out some images that pop up in my mind in sketchbooks. It depends on the size of work, but for big size ones, I usually ink it directly without draft. I use ideas that flash in my mind at the moment, along with using my sketchbooks. From a distance, I look at the whole balance of work, and finally determine the image, which takes about one year after I started drawing. Recently, I try to have a whole solid image in the beginning to shorten the time.

**When the Great East Earthquake hit Japan in 2011, you were living in Canada with your family. Your latest show, “Meltdown,” at Vancouver Art Gallery was inspired by the earthquake. How did it feel to explore your feelings about the incident without physically being there? What inspired you to address the 2011 earthquake directly?**

I was very shocked. Because I was abroad, I got the impression that the earthquake damaged Japan, not just the Tohoku area (northern Japan). I was distressed over my helplessness, but I remember feeling that I wanted my work to empower people who suffered from the earthquake, as well as the people of Japan. However, on the other hand, I felt speechless, anxiety and danger about the nuclear accident, which was a human disaster. I got the urge to draw this issue of radiation contamination. It could happen not only in Japan, but anywhere in the world.

**What was your reaction when people called your *Foretoken* painting prophetic after the 2011 earthquake?**

The correlation with the tsunami was surely just a coincidence, but I feel prophetic as one aspect of this work is a warning that civilization is about to be swallowed by the vast power of nature. As a person who drew *Foretoken*, I feel it is my mission to draw the after effect of the earthquake as well.

**Nature versus industrialization plays a big part in your work. What attracts you to nature? Why focus on the dangers of technology when given its advantages?**

The shape, color, and expression of nature... water, bugs, trees and weather, all those provide me with heart pumping sensations and questions. They strongly attract me. I agree that we benefit a lot from advanced technology, but at the same time, I feel that we are acting contrary to nature, which makes me feel endangered. Also, figuratively, accomplished shapes do not move my heart. At the end, for example, the mystery of a caterpillar's color and shape is much more fun for me than any amazing technology.

**How is Japan's response to your work different from overseas?**

I receive same amount of questions regarding technique and completion time, but I get the impression that people overseas are more interested in the back ground of my work, such as the painting's concept, historical view and artistic view.