

Special Exhibition

Toshio Tabuchi

Depicting Time Eternal

Japanese-style painter Toshio Tabuchi (1941-) is a rare individual who manages to achieve a balance between traditional decorativeness and spirituality in his painting at a very high level. The roots of Tabuchi's art, which gives us a feeling of timelessness in the activities of everyday life, were rapidly established during the course of the fifteen-year period of his affiliation with Aichi University of the Arts. Even after becoming the administrative director of the Nihon Bijutsuin (Japan Art Institute) and receiving the Japanese government Award for Distinguished Cultural Merit, he has continued to produce works that make people realize the great potential of Japanese-style painting known as Nihonga.

Because of Tabuchi's close ties to this region, the Tokugawa Art Museum, which has a rich collection of exceptional Japanese art, was chosen to host this exhibition of his work. The object selection includes pieces that have been recommended by the artist himself, including several new works.

Also scheduled to be exhibited are the "Poetry and Genre Scenes from Yuki Province," which were presented at the time of the *daikyō-no-gi* grand banquets that took place in conjunction with the new emperor's enthronement ceremonies held in 2019.

April 18 (Sun.) - May 30 (Sun.), 2021

Exhibition Rooms 7-9 at The Tokugawa Art Museum

[Section 1]
Water and Light

Tabuchi himself recounts that he painted Water (no. 1, 1966), one of his very first artworks, in the early morning, as he was struck by the light reflecting off the Edogawa river near his home. As this shows, the impression he received from water and light in the very early stages was what inspired Tabuchi to paint. His manner of painting here is completely different from the elegant colors and delicate lines that characterize his later works. This is because the work still retains the influence of the postwar Japanese-style painting movement, which strove to negate the concept of external beauty.

Tabuchi express light in a multitude of forms, such as sunlight filtered through the trees, light that sparkles in the haze, or light reflected on the water's surface. Backlighting is used to great effect in Season of Overflowing Green (no. 45, 2005), which is featured in Part 5. Light reflected on the surface of the sea is the subject of Departure (no. 37, 1996), which appears in Part 4, "Time and Human Life." As this demonstrates, Tabuchi produced many works in response to water and light. This is one of the most important angles from which to appreciate Tabuchi's work.

The following marks in the list indicate the period on exhibit:
* from April 18 (Sun.) to May 9 (Sun.)
** from May 11 (Tue.) to May 30 (Sun.)

1	Water	1966	
2	Aokigahara Forest*	1969	*
3	Scorching Afternoon	1998	*
4	Through the Window of Lodging / A Moment	2002	
5	Reflection	2002	*
6	Internal Image of Kurobe, Mt.Okukane	2004	**
7	Shining Light	2005	**
8	Fearful Thunderbolt	2009	**

[Section 2]
Grass and Flowers

After completing graduate school, Tabuchi went to Nigeria, which was still mired in civil war, and continued to sketch flowers and plants there. What impressed him most during this time was the resilience of the weeds and the chain of life that persisted in this scorching hot land.

Even at the Aichi University of the Arts, where he was posted shortly after returning to Japan, Tabuchi continued to sketch the plants and nature of the lush countryside. Tabuchi received many awards for his paintings of the grasses and flowers that repeated the cycle of sprouting, blooming, and withering around him. The recognition he received was for his depictions of the resilience of these grasses and flowers rather than their outward beauty.

At the same time, however, Tabuchi's paintings already possessed the traditional decorative qualities of Japanese painting, and his lines were beautiful. This group of works, which interweave the traditional beauty of Japanese painting with the theme of life, forms one of the pinnacles of Tabuchi's art.

9	Blossom Season of Woodland Sumac	1974	
10	Wind of Green	1988	*
11	Blooming Season of Kudzu	1990	
12	Willow	2000	**
13	Full Bloom	2003	**
14	Plum in Full Bloom	2005	

[Section 3]

Travels and Time

After moving from Aichi University of the Arts, where he had worked for more than ten years, to Tokyo University of the Arts, Tabuchi's work became busier and he began to travel abroad more frequently. While he sometimes traveled as a painter for the purpose of sketching, he also often took part in research trips related to the restoration and conservation of Japanese artworks abroad due to his high level of insight into the materials and techniques of Japanese painting.

When he looks at grasses and flowers, Tabuchi is impressed by the continuity of life he sees in them, and when he looks at rural landscapes, he thinks of the soldiers who would have run across these fields in the past. Even a landscape that he glimpses just for a moment on his travels can capture Tabuchi's interest for the continuity of human life that is hidden within it, and this is what he puts into his paintings. This is probably why one can feel a sense of time in his works.

Tabuchi expresses this kind of momentary realization of temporality with the title "Toki (Time)," which has become a major theme in his work. This section introduces some of Tabuchi's works that depict time eternal hidden in the fleeting scenes that he glimpsed in his overseas travels.

15	Time	1992	
16	Eternal	1993	*
17	Through the Window of Lodging / At Sunset	1996	**
18	Dialogue	1998	
19	Through the Window of Lodging / Back Window	1999	
20	Transition of Time	2003	*
21	Eternal Land / Full Moon above an Oasis	2004	
22	Memories of Travels / Gugong, China	2010	**
23	Memories of Travels / Shaoxing, China	2010	
24	Memories of Travels / Yangguan, China	2010	*
25	Memories of Travels / The Great Wall, China	2010	
26	Memories of Travels / Dayanta Tower, China	2010	**
27	Memories of Travels / Yungang, China	2010	*
28	Memories of Travels / Longmen, China	2010	**
29	Memories of Travels / West Lake, China	2010	*
30	Huaqing Pond, China	2010	**
31	Memories of Travels / Mt. Huang, China	2010	

[Section 4]
Time and Human Life

What lies further behind the temporality (time) in Tabuchi's works is probably the people. Tabuchi frequently painted the scenery around his home, but he says that as he would paint, the images of the local people of those areas from times past would rise up in his mind's eye.

In addition to these thoughts about the people of the past, what is even more characteristic of Tabuchi is the way that he looks at the lives of the people living there in the present. Beginning in the second half of the 1970s, Tabuchi began to integrate into his images man-made objects, such as plastic greenhouses and high voltage line towers (e.g., *Signs of Spring*, no. 40, 1991), which had previously been avoided in Japanese painting. These are actually nothing if not proof of the activities of modern people. They are proof of the existence of human life that has continued unbroken across the ages, and the gaze he turns on them is surely the same eye that he turns to the weeds clinging so resiliently to life.

This section introduces works that allow us to feel the glimmer of the myriad forms of life of which humans are just a part, expressed so memorably by Tabuchi through the simple activities of daily life.

32	Pure Clean Morning	1980	
33	Tower	1983	*
34	Blowing off the Time	2000	**
35	Internal Image of Yamato / Distant View of Hōryūji Temple	2004	
36	Harvesting Season	1992	
37	Departure	1996	
38	A Wharf	1998	
39	Witnesses of Time I	2000	**
40	Signs of Spring	1991	
41	Eternal Land / Land of Water	2004	
42	Moonlight	2014	*
43	Yoshino	2017	**

[Section 5]
Life and Light
— Tabuchi Toshio at Present —

When looking at Tabuchi's painting career as a whole, one can see that although the subjects of his work have changed, the core of his work has not deviated from the various elements of water, light, life, time and human activity that so characterize Tabuchi's oeuvre. In fact, these elements combined result in even greater appeal taken together.

In terms of technique, Tabuchi's work in ink painting over the past twenty years has been widely recognized. It was only after he started painting interior wall and sliding door panels for temples and shrines that he finally began to work in this medium, but here too it is his handling of light that is striking.

And Tabuchi has also taken on the challenge of a new medium—painted picture scrolls. One could describe his overall painting career as starting with (1) "dark expressive mindscapes," growing rapidly with (2) "decorative painted surfaces," meeting the challenge of (3) "expression through ink," then tackling the medium of (4) "picture scrolls." This progression actually follows the trajectory of the history of Japanese painting backward in time, from the Showa era to the Edo period, through the Muromachi and Momoyama periods, to the Heian and Kamakura periods. Amidst the autonomous development that he has shown all while continuing simply to paint, Tabuchi has always been able to offer us new ways to be charmed by Japanese painting. Without doubt, he will continue to do so in the future.

44	Clouds and Water	2002	
45	Season of Overflowing Green	2005	*
46	Simon Bamboo	2007	
47	Spring (Weeping Cherry Tree)	2008	
48	Illustrated Handscroll of the Legends of Tsurugaoka Hachiman Shrine, Vol. 1	2011	
49	Illustrated Handscroll of the Legends of Tsurugaoka Hachiman Shrine, Vol. 2	2020	
50	Poetry and Genre Scenes from Yuki Province	2019	*

