TARO NASU

Yosuke Bandai
digitus
Saturday, January 16 - Saturday, February 20, 2021
Gallery Hours: 12:00-17:00　Tue. - Sat.
Closed on Sun., Mon., and Public Holidays

TARO NASU is pleased to announce Yosuke Bandai's solo exhibition "digitus".

Born in 1980, Tokyo, Japan. Lives and works in Tokyo, Japan.
Recent exhibitions include "Roppongi Crossing 2019 : Connexion" (Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, JP), "FOTO / INDUSTRIA" (International Museum and Library of Music, Bologna, IT) in 2019, "APMoA Project, ARCH：Digitize memory with 5" (Aichi Prefectural Museum of Art, Aichi, JP) in 2017, "Friday, September 9 - Friday, October 7, 2016" (TARO NASU, Tokyo, JP) in 2016, "Passersby" (CAPSLE, Tokyo, JP) in 2015, " I trust only the rib, after all, you know?" (TARO NASU, Tokyo, JP) in 2014, "Disordered Bandai; His Unequalled Passion" (AI KOWADA GALLEY, Tokyo, JP) in 2012, "RADICON" (hiromiyoshii, Tokyo, JP) in 2009, and more.

Nested Mimicry and Signpost Fingers

In this exhibition, the concepts of mimicry and digital technology intertwine on numerous levels.
The moment they step into the exhibition space, visitors will see taxidermy specimens of owls perched on massage table legs, like a row of statues on columns. These stuffed owls are strangely gaunt. The reason for this unnatural-seeming appearance is that the northern white-faced owl mimics the shapes of tree branches. They use mimicry to protect themselves from enemies—to preserve their own lives.

This exhibition uses these owls as the launching point for explorations of mimicry, combining various fields such as photography, painting, and digital technology.

At the heart of the exhibition are digital images that appear to have been roughly sketched with simple digital devices. All of them seem to be farmland and other landscapes. There is an overarching vagueness that makes it hard to tell for certain, but many of these landscapes have what look like roads, extending from the foreground into the background, emphasizing their depth.

Let's begin by looking at those depths. One of the perennial challenges of painting has been to cause the observer to perceive depth in a flat, two-dimensional surface. To create an artwork that presents a wide-open view through the use of optical perspective is to trick the viewer. One could even call it a form of mimicry. In other words, these pieces have used digital images to intentionally present a type of mimicry in the history of art.

However, although viewers are enticed to look into the depths of the images, their line of sight is not drawn in smoothly. This is because of the presence of an unsettling object—a person's finger. This is the digitus, which also serves as the title of this series of works. It's no plant or building; it is clearly a human finger. It stands tall, casting a shadow, clearly an element of the landscape depicted in the two-dimensional surface. These clearly depicted fingers appear in only a few of the two-dimensional works, but once a viewer notices one finger, they begin checking the other works for fingers.

The overall vague, blurry nature of the images makes the presence of the finger even more mysterious. The borders between the ground and the figure are undefined, and the foreground, mid-ground, and background appear to be stacked. That's why, even if the finger casts a shadow, it is hard to tell where in the landscape it is standing. That gauzy presence of the fingers evokes totem poles, creating a bizarre rawness that is not quite a nostalgic familiarity nor an unsettling eeriness. The organic element of the finger is a trigger that makes it feel as if the entire hazy image is breathing.

We've looked at the surface elements (owls engaged in mimicry, landscapes and fingers depicted in digital images) used as visual components in this exhibition. However, this is not enough to fully elucidate the mazelike structure that makes up these works. Now, let's explore the process by which they were created.

I initially introduced the digital images as "digital images that appear to have been roughly sketched with simple digital devices," but, in reality, these images were all created by using Photoshop with digital photographs found online to make them look like images created using smartphone drawing apps. In other words, these images all began as photographs, and the artist Yosuke Bandai attempted to use mimicry to make them resemble paintings.

Creating photographs that mimic paintings is not that unusual—it can be seen in artistic movements such as pictorialism. However, what sets the works of this exhibition apart is that, visually, it is impossible to discern if the output images are photographs or paintings. In other words, since there are no physical manifestations of their process of creation, as there are with silver halide photographs or oil paintings, the temporal relationships of the process of creating and editing digital images are unified in the form of the output that exists here and now. Because of that, once an image has been edited, it is not possible to visually distinguish what parts of the image are original, which were edited, and how the edited elements were changed. Going back to the owl example, it would be like not knowing if the owls were mimicking trees, or if they were originally trees.

Applications such as Photoshop themselves contain elements that mimic existing devices and tools. For example, they have functions such as brush tools. Needless to say, these brush tool functions, with which people draw lines and paint colors on their screens, are vastly different than actual brushes, which are held in one's hand, dipped into paint, and used to apply that paint to surfaces. However, these brush tools used on displays are designed to mimic physical brushes, and their icons are representations of brushes. These functions of digital devices mimic completely different types of experiences and actions to make them more familiar to users. This tendency to mimic conventional devices and tools with digital devices can be seen everywhere, such as in slideshow functions and filters used to create film-like images.

Camera and image editing functions themselves have moved away from independent devices such as cameras, instead becoming elements in countless applications installed in digital devices. Photographs can be taken, edited, and published using smartphones and tablet computers, without using a camera. This could be seen as the disappearance of cameras as devices, yet the icons used on smartphones and other displays feature representations of conventional SLR cameras and lenses. Digital devices are in the process of engulfing physical cameras, and, by mimicking their functions and appearance, they behave as if

conventional cameras and photographic editing still exist.

At the same time, the people who use these digital devices have, in a way, also internalized the processes of using digital devices to take photographs, edit images, and publish those images. Recently, many people who take photographs consider the whole process, from how to take photographs to how to edit them and publish them, as a single, integrated activity. It's not a difficult matter. What kinds of filters should be applied to photographs after taking them? Where should they be published and to whom should they be directed? What information should accompany them? Aspects of the image editing and publishing process such as these are considered and acted on instantaneously when people post photos on the internet. It is as if the various functions of devices (such as autofocus, filters, autotagging, and the like) are already part of the photographers themselves. Photographers strive to align their workflows with their devices' applications in order to effectively leverage these digital tools. One might even characterize these people as "mimicking" machines.

In other words, these works deal with digital technology, but nest multiple levels of mimicry in the process of editing digital images using digital technology. The act of editing photographs as images, the applications used in those processes, and the functions of digital devices have all been internalized, and people align themselves with these functions and perspectives. Different levels of mimicry envelop digital images like a network, encompassing them both on a detailed and on a holistic level.

You may feel that this description has strayed far from the images of the works themselves. Let us return, then, to the images of the exhibition—evocative of images created using smartphone drawing apps. One of the main features of smartphone drawing apps is that their images are fundamentally created by drawing with one's finger (digitus). On smartphones, users create images by touching their displays with their fingers.

This connects the images of fingers appearing in two-dimensional works, referred to in the name of the series, and the process of creating images using smartphone drawing apps, which is the goal of the series. The fingers that appear in the images are themselves the tools used to create these images, but can be seen as depicted in the images themselves. These fingers have a presence both at the level of elements within images, and at the meta-level of the creation of the images.

That said, Yosuke Bandai does not seem to have the intent to visualize layers of technology hidden in images by self-referentially handling the actual process of creating the images. It also lacks a strong critical aspect that seeks to disrupt the relationship between the images and the systems used to generate them. The tepid attitude of digital images, which even tolerate the presence of fingers, which should not be shown and should not even be visible, is the underlying tone that pervades the series. There is no longer a need to fracture or distort parts of the image to expose the reality behind the apparent realism of the image. Instead, even if the true reality behind the apparent realism of the image is exposed, it will be ignored. This attitude, I believe, represents the current state of digital technology.

So let us go back, now, to the title of the series. The adjectival form of “digitus,” the Latin word for “finger,” is “digital.” One theory states that the act of counting on one’s fingers eventually led to the use of the word “digital.” If that is true, then, we can say that the digital technologies used by Yosuke Bandai are originally equipped with the concept of the “digitus.”

First, the etymology of “digital” traces back to the finger. Second, the digital technology of smartphone drawing apps is operated through finger contact. The two are imaginatively tied together through this analogy. At the point of their juncture is the image of the finger itself—through this power of association, these two ideas, from totally different worlds, are overlapped.

Fingers also have the function of pointing. Perhaps we should say that the fingers that stand tall in these digital images are mimicking signs alongside the road. They all point up. Does this mean that they point to the top of the image, or above the image, to the network that connects them? We’ve been imagining that the fingers are index fingers...but might they be middle fingers, instead? What would it mean to give the middle finger in the middle of a digital image? The arcane analogies involving fingers and mimicry point the way, but the destination they point remains hazy and indistinct.

Fumiko Nakamura（Curator, Aichi Prefectural Museum of Art）