

Art Installation of the 1980's in Japan from the 'white Cube' Point of View - between Modernism and Anti-Modernism

MORIGUCHI Madoka

This paper aims to explore one aspect of art installation work of the mid '80's in Japan stressing a connection with the concept of the 'white cube.' Art installation itself is not an unique practice at all but the type of installation which appeared in the '80's made by young artists recalls a so called Japanese sensibility and the representation of ambiguity and ambivalence.

In the first two decades after opening the Museum of Modern Art in New York (founded in 1929, hereafter MoMA) the seven founders of the museum who later became the members of the Advisory Committee and the museum's first director, Alfred H. Barr, Jr(1902-81) formulated two important issues regarding 'modern art.' One issue is of course the concern of the collection. In fact according to a brochure drafted by Barr, the museum's ultimate purpose would be to create a collection of the best modern works of art. The permanent collection of the museum was formed on the basis of Barr's conception of the development of modern art which was visualised in a well-known diagram, this conception of modern art states that modern art develops inevitably towards abstraction. The second issue is the establishment of the 'white cube' exhibition space which along with the modernist collection became an international standard for modern art museums. In the modern museum, abstract art and the white cube entered into a symbiotic relationship. Not only MoMA is the most influential museum of this kind but it also standardises the notion of modernist art and the way of displaying it.

Many modern art museums were founded or refurbished in Japan especially in the '80's. Most of these newly created modern art museums had the affect of internationally standardising the 'white cube.' With the popularisation of the white wall concept among artists in Japan, a younger generation of artists became keenly aware of the type of space where their works would be displayed. Simultaneously some young artists in the '80's started to present

installation works that were very much influenced by the art movements Minimalism and Mono-ha. Artists like IMAMURA Hajime and MATSUI Chie freed from the conventional use of sculptural materials deviated into alternative and diverse expression. Although in the mid 80's there still was not a complete white cube space in the area where they worked they had taken the concept or actual look of the white cube for granted.

While installation artists in America and Europe have often come from the notion of breaking up an autonomous art across an expanded field of culture that was in much site-specific art, installation works by Japanese artists, IMAMURA and MATSUI for example have in most cases been exhibited in the white cube at a museum or a gallery space where autonomy and a neutral context for the art works is claimed. However, even though they are installed in a neutral space they still effectively manipulate the condition of the interior. From these points of view, the nature of installation work in Japan simultaneously implies both modernist and anti-modernist concepts. The majority of museums in Japan still grounded in a modernist outlook need to consider the ambivalence of these works when making them part of their permanent collection.