

Event Report

SDGs and Mécénat vol. 5

Special Lecture: Revitalizing Depopulated Areas Through Art [Report]



On Thursday, December 10th, 2020, a special lecture was held at the Tokyo Midtown Conference (Akasaka) on the topic of "Revitalizing Depopulated Areas Through Art" with Mr. Soichiro Fukutake, an honorary advisor of Benesse Holdings, Inc. The event was also streamed live on YouTube, and Mr. Fukutake made his appearance online from New Zealand, where he lives.

This lecture is the fifth seminar on SDGs and Mécénat, an ongoing initiative of the Association for Corporate Support of the Arts since 2018. In the beginning, Sumiko Sawada, Executive Director of the Association for Corporate Support of the Arts, explained that this seminar series aims to share information about the role and potential of Mécénat in relation to social issues, add more value to corporate activities, and provide companies with hints on how to promote their activities. She then introduced Mr. Fukutake's profile. A five-minute introductory video about Benesse Art Site Naoshima was shown first, and then Mr. Soichiro Fukutake began his online lecture.

◆ Soichiro Fukutake's Philosophy

Soichiro Fukutake, an honorary advisor to Benesse Holdings Co., Ltd. and chairman of the Fukutake Foundation, inherited the dream of his father, who

passed away suddenly in 1986. He has led the Naoshima Project in the Seto Inland Sea since 1987. About ten years after he became president of Fukutake Publishing Co., Ltd., the company changed its name in 1995. The company was named "Benesse," a portmanteau of the words "bene" (well) and "esse" (being), which is his philosophy and also the company's philosophy. He made an interesting observation as he described the culture shock he experienced at the time. "As I became involved with the islands and with the people, I found that although they had far fewer material goods, information, and entertainment than people in the big city of Tokyo, they seemed happier than the people living in Tokyo," he said, probably referring to himself as well. Since then, Benesse has achieved significant growth as a company that supports and accompanies people throughout their lives. His words, "Nature is man's greatest teacher," resonated strongly because they are rooted in his own experience of how nature and art have awakened people and changed communities. Mr. Fukutake's concept of a "happy community," his life principle, will be discussed later.

Special Lecture on Revitalizing Depopulated Areas Through Art: The Case of Naoshima and Rural Chugoku



First, he talked about Benesse Art Site Naoshima and its history of development. The islands of the Seto Inland Sea were the first places in Japan to be recognized as a national park. They also supported Japan's modernization and rapid post-war growth but were burdened with its negative legacy. During his heavy involvement with these islands, Mr. Fukutake became highly skeptical of the idea of civilization built on

"destruction and creation," in other words, the concept of "destroying what is to create something new," which is the basis of modernization. This led to a shift in focus from a "civilization that repeatedly destroys and creates" to a "civilization that sustains and grows" in which "we use what exists to create what is to be." I think that this concept of "using what exists to create what is to be" is the very essence of today's SDGs.

Mr. Fukutake tried to resist the tide of the times by using contemporary art as a weapon on the battleground that is Benesse Art Site Naoshima. Looking back on his longstanding partnership with architect Tadao Ando in Naoshima, he said that Mr. Ando, who was born in Osaka rather than Tokyo and had been a professional boxer, was the right partner to fight alongside him. The idea of utilizing the power of art for regional revitalization was inspired by Yasuo Kuniyoshi, a painter from Okayama who was based in the United States. It all began when he focused on the message of Kuniyoshi's paintings, which reflected society and the state of the world. The Okayama Prefectural Museum of Art currently has a collection of works by Yasuo Kuniyoshi as part of the Fukutake Collection.

◆ Benesse Art Site Naoshima: Architecture and Art

Next, there was an introduction of the representative works of Benesse Art Site Naoshima. Starting with the Hotel Benesse House (1992), designed by Tadao Ando, there is a wide variety of works.

- Naoshima: Yayoi Kusama's "Pumpkin" (1994), Bruce Nauman's "One Hundred Live And Die" (1984), Hiroshi Sugimoto's "Time Exposed" (1982-1997), Yukinori Yanagi's "Banzai Corner 1996", Cai Guo-Qiang's "Cultural Melting Bath: Project for Naoshima" (1998), Tatsuo Miyajima's Art House Project 'Kadoya' "Sea of Time '98" (1998), Hiroshi Sugimoto's Art House Project "Go'o Shrine" "Appropriate Proportion" (2002), Chichu Art Museum (2004), Claude Monet's "Water Lilies", Walter De Maria's "Time/Timeless/No Time" (2004), James Turrell's "Open Field" (2000), Shinro Otake's "Naoshima Bath "I♥湯" (2009), Lee Ufan Museum (2010), Lee Ufan's "Porte vers l'infini" (2019), ANDO MUSEUM (2013), etc.

- Inujima: Inujima Seirenscho Art Museum (2008), Beatriz Milhazes "Yellow

Flower Dream" (2018) at the Inujima "Art House Project," etc.

• Teshima: Teshima Art Museum (2010), Rei Naito's "Matrix" (2010), Teshima Yokoo House (2013), etc.

There is a comprehensive website about Benesse Art Site Naoshima.

<https://benesse-artsite.jp/>

◆◆Benesse Art Site Naoshima Earns High Acclaim Overseas

In the 30 years since 1990, the number of visitors to Naoshima has increased from a few thousand to 700,000 per year, with many coming from overseas. It has received high acclaim worldwide. Condè Nast Traveler selected it as one of the "New Seven Wonders of the World" in 2000. It was also ranked No. 1 on the "The Cool List 2019" by National Geographic Traveller. In 2020, Lonely Planet Best of Japan ranked it as the 4th best place to visit in Japan.

In order for art to revitalize regions and awaken people, a circulation of nature, environment, art, architecture, and people is necessary, and therein lies the creation of a rich community not found in cities. In 2010, the French art magazine "artpress" called this circulation the "Naoshima Method," defining it as a way to revitalize devastated areas and their communities through art.

アートが地域を活性化させ人々を覚醒させるには

自然

+

環境

+

アート

+

建築

+

人々

In order for art to revitalize regions and awaken people, we need:
nature + environment + art + architecture + people

“直島メソッド”



「artpress」
(フランス、2010)

“Naoshima Method”

“artpress” (France, 2010)

◆Message from Soichiro Fukutake

Everyone wants to live a happy life. When he thought deeply about what is necessary for happiness, Mr. Soichiro Fukutake concluded that one must live in a "happy community." Needless to say, there are some things that he noticed over the past 30 years at Benesse Art Site Naoshima. After seeing how the seniors of Naoshima got accustomed to contemporary art and became livelier as they smiled and interacted with the young people visiting the island, he came to define a "happy community" as "a place full of smiling seniors who have mastered life." He saw that the smiles of seniors there symbolized the smiles of the young people, babies, and the community where they belonged. Knowing that "the older you get, the happier you are" can bring hope to those of us in a society with an uncertain future.

In addition, it is essential to establish a stable financial base to continue the various activities outlined so far. It is noteworthy that the Fukutake family, which runs on dividends from shares, the Fukutake Foundation, and Benesse have established an integrated system and are making efforts to achieve sustainability.

Mr. Soichiro Fukutake asserts that "the economy is a servant to culture." He also said that its purpose is for people to live happily. "It is the companies that create wealth that should put their efforts into culture," said the business guru as he dwelled on the smiles of people who will continue to be involved and the beautiful Seto Inland Sea.

幸せなコミュニティとは？

What Makes a Happy Community?



人生の達人であるお年寄りの
笑顔が溢れているところ

A place full of smiling seniors who have mastered life.

◆ Introduction of the Setouchi Triennale

An international art festival started in 2010 with Mr. Soichiro Fukutake as the general producer and Mr. Fram Kitagawa as the general director. The festival is held in three seasons, spring, summer, and autumn, to give visitors a sense of Japan's four seasons. The event is held in 12 islands and two port towns in the Seto Inland Sea, with 230 groups of artists from 32 countries and regions participating. Visitors number more than 1.17 million in total. There are a total of 5,000 participants in the Koebitai volunteer organization, and about 28% of them are volunteers from overseas. The next event (which will be the fifth) is scheduled to be held in 2022.

<https://setouchi-artfest.jp/>

◆ Introduction of an Overseas Development: Taohua Island Project in Shandong Province, China

In 2017, the Fukutake Center for Art & Philanthropy was established to promote local rural communities through art, and a rural revitalization project was started. It focuses on four pillars of rural development. The first

is the improvement of agricultural varieties. The second is the establishment of a system in which local communities are responsible for primary (farming), secondary (processing), and tertiary (sales) sectors. The third is a "collective farming system" in which rural people work together to help and support each other. The fourth is the construction of an agricultural development institute for learning agricultural techniques and training human resources. As part of the overseas development of the "Naoshima Method," it is also working on the "Art House Project" and the creation of artworks in the region. A museum, hotel, and observation platform are currently under construction in collaboration with French architect Paul Andreu, who designed the buildings.

◆Q&A / Discussion

After the lecture, a question-and-answer session was held. A wide range of participants actively asked questions at the venue and online. Participants included corporate members, Oita Prefectural Government representatives, media organization members, and graduate students from Hong Kong who took part in the "Koebitai" volunteer program. There were questions about people moving to Naoshima, the possibility of using the Naoshima method in other areas, the project in Shandong Province, China, interest in depopulated areas and harmonizing differing local interests, art projects that can be launched with little funding, the impact of the novel coronavirus, and visions for the future. He answered each question in detail.

About the Writer:

Taisuke Wada, Art Manager

Born in 1977 in Kobe. Graduated from Hyogo Prefectural Kobe High School, and Doshisha University's Department of Letters, majoring in Aesthetics and Art Theory. After working at Isetan, he changed jobs to work with the Japan Philharmonic Orchestra. He oversaw public relations, sales, and planning and production. He returned to his hometown in 2012. At the Kyoto City Music Art and Cultural Promoting Foundation, he supervised the reconstruction of Kyoto Kaikan and the Kyoto Concert Hall's independent projects. He has been working at the Minoh-City Foundation of Culture since 2015, working as its art creation section manager since April 2020.