

The Sky and Gravity and the Apple, and its Alter Ego

An apple, which includes the meaning of being a fruit in itself, could be interpreted as “the fruit of fruit,” or in other words, “the most unspecial” fruit on our planet. The relationship between me and apple has been quite long now, which does not allow me to make an excuse of “I don’t know much about it, it’s only one of my many motifs.” It was in such circumstances that Aomori Museum of Art offered me an exhibition of “agriculture and art.” I usually do not prefer to create or look at works that highlight its research too much, as I feel it’s like self-reporting “how weak your right-brain is,” however, for this occasion, I sensed I could solidly confront researching an apple, or in fact, ought to do so.

First of all, I would like to chronologically explain the relationship between me and my “works of apple motifs” to clarify my starting point:

1999

Produced my first work of an apple, as one of the varied motifs of sculptures.

2005-

My second experience of creating an apple. I made three melting apples for my first time. Since then, I have created approximately 70 of them on and off, which some were unmelted, some were black and white, and some had paint on their surfaces. During this period, I had to confront the torment of “the surface needing to be more realistic than a real apple” each time, as a melting apple would lack some reality. In order to finish my work on time, I had no choice but to seriously think, “What is it that makes an apple an apple?”

2011

Up until this year when I relocated to Europe, my works of apples were made by non-foamed urethane (similar to plastic) and oil paint, with the use of clay as its mold. After relocating to Europe, I have been using oil paint on wood.

2015

I began implementing detailed research towards apples. I started observing an apple tree in my studio in Berlin. I planted an apple tree in my studio in Japan.

2017

*Started preparation for the project, *The Universal Apple* (tentative).*

2018

Implemented several researches in Aomori, including Ringo Shiryo-kan (Apple Museum) (Kuroishi city), JA (Japanese Agricultural Cooperatives), storages, and others.

*Visited Kaoru Sugiyama, the author of *Aomori ken no ringo* (Apples in Aomori Prefecture).*

Visited Professor Osamu Arakawa (Pomology/Hirosaki University, Faculty of Agriculture and Life Science).

Purchased apple wood and ordered its sawing at Kimura Mokkojo (Kimura Woodworking Shop).

Underwent a farming training with an apple farmer.

2019

Started observing the apple tree in my Berlin studio, with partly applying farming to the tree.

Take participation in the exhibition at Aomori Museum of Art (October - December).

2020

Start farming apples (as soon as conditions are ready).

*Start production of the sculpture, *Apple (Universality) 2020*.*

2023

*Jointly develop an exhibition case with apple storage and/or display case vendors. Apples inside this exhibition case will be maintained as a CA storage (low oxygen level), with its temperature controlled at 0 to 1 °C, in order to avoid discoloration as much as possible. The period in which the occurring discoloration would be an acceptable range will become the exhibition period, where a real apple will be showcased next to *Apple (Universality) 2019*.*

- (period TBA)

*Produce an apple “fruit” by farming myself and make it look similar to the sculpture *Apple (Universality) 2019*, a sculpture made for the purpose of exhibiting a sculpture and a fruit next to each other. How many years it would take to achieve this is not yet confirmed.*

One of the fundamental reasons why I have continued creating works of apples are because of their wide variety of surfaces. Despite the fact that apples are one of the most popular fruits in the world, their appearances widely differentiate according to which country and area. In fact, they quite widely differentiate even when they come from the same tree. I used to delightfully enjoy expressing the wide variation of their appearances when I started to create works of apples, but from a certain point, my interest started heading towards “the most apple-ish apple for everyone”

instead. I became puzzled; how can make an “apple-ish apple for everyone” when there are infinite numbers of local-appearances (i.e., infinite numbers of “my apples”)?

When I draw surfaces of my apple sculpture, I do not just simply “copy the surface of a fruit on an artificial model.” It is as though I investigate the story of “how the apple grew up in what kind of landscape and weather, how it was picked up, and how it was stored before it came in front of me.” It is only then that I can finally draw the “current” status of its context. It may sound as a complicated process, but unless I can fully visualize the chronological sequence of its story, the apple would end up looking unnatural. This means I need to imagine the entire phenomenon that had happened to the apple, including “how its bud blossomed into a flower; how it made its fruit; when did its colk-ish dots appear; when did it start to turn red; and why does it have an uneven pattern?” and so on.

And to add even more complexity, this sequence needs to match the large providence of the Earth. To give an example, “the leaves photosynthesize with the sunray that come from above, and the flowers bloom in that direction too, and then it becomes heavier and results in coming lower down = that is why many of the stems of apples are mostly curved = the sky exists above, and the gravity pulls things below = we exist on the Earth.” Something like that. So, perhaps it might not be too adventurous to state that “the reason why many people feel more natural to see a stem of an apple being curved is because we humans have been spending such a long amount of time on the surface of the Earth, and see that as a universal basis of recognition.” The human eyes are actually quite accurate in judging things. Even if there were a symbolic pattern or color that would resemble an apple, if the person cannot (even unconsciously) find a “universality” that would penetrate all kinds of localities within that “story,” humans would not make a judgement that it would seem “realistic.”

Now, if I would step even further and scan the surfaces of apples, one of the most interesting facts is that their appearances completely differentiate when they are farmed differently, even if they were the same cultivar. To give a simple example, Japanese apple farmers would leave only one flower in the middle and pick about five or six flowers surrounding it, and then would pick a few more flowers a few weeks later, in order to grow a large apple. Furthermore, they’d turn the apple around, pick its leaves, and use an agricultural mulch to create reflective light from the ground. Covering the fruit with bags is another method used by the Japanese apple farmers to increase anthocyanin, which triggers the apple to turn red. In short, what the Japanese farmers are doing is actually modelling and coloring. It could be said that apples are already “sculptured” by the hands of the farmers. On the other hand, European apples are all much smaller as they do not have such intense flower picking. Various patterns of random colors would appear on their surfaces too, as each neighboring fruit would block the sunshine among each other.

If I were to once put things straight and explain “what is it that I enjoy looking at the surfaces of apples,” the answer would be that when I carefully analyze the occurrences that have happened to their surfaces, I reach the answer of “human behaviors,” as their prime numbers. That is to say, by reading their surfaces and playing backwards the history of farming that the apple had experienced, I can see “humans” appearing as motion pictures from their surfaces. To look at surfaces of apples for me, is to look at the “society” and “civilization.”

Obviously, these differences found in the ways of agriculture do not only derive from the difference in nationality (while I do admit that might be part of it too). My prediction is that the Aomori prefecture, which dominates more than half of the domestic production of apples in Japan, was probably not the most preferable place for growing apples. Aomori has a much higher humidity average and hot summer with heavy snow in winter compared to the Caucasus, where apples (academic name: *Malus Pumila*) originated from. Basically, apples could not be harvested unless they were thoroughly taken good care of.

Mr. Kimura in Aomori, who is renowned for harvesting the “miracle apple” without the use of any fertilization nor agrichemicals, says he could not even grow a single apple fruit for the first seven years when he started it, and had to face dire poverty during that period. On the other hand, in Berlin where I currently reside in, any “wild apple tree” (like an abandoned “wild dog”) could have abundant apple fruit without doing anything to them. There is an apple tree in my studio too, which literally no one takes care of, but has grown up to seven meters tall and becomes loaded with apple fruit every year.

The history of apples in Japan, which seemingly was not the perfect place for apple farming, began in 1871 when the first apple seedling was purchased, and in 1875 when three small apple trees have arrived to Aomori. 150 years later, apples have now become the main force for the prefecture of Aomori. Although this person added it is probably an urban legend, one concerned personnel shared with me that the tax income of the prefecture widely differs each year according to how the apples had harvested > (there were times where it seemed that) budgets allocated to cultural facilities such as museums would somewhat change accordingly = “good exhibitions can be made when apples harvest well.” No one has yet proved whether the correlation between the amount of harvested apples and the exhibition budgets really exist or not, but there is no doubt that the living quality of the citizens, its culture, and its apples have an intimate relationship in Aomori Prefecture.

So, it has been a long way, but finally the soil is ready and I can speak of my exhibition.

This time, I tried to make a “universal apple.” The word “universal” means “a behavior that can describe everything within a certain area” or “something that is true in the entire world and universe.” Obviously, no “friend,” “car,” “liqueur,” “God,” nor “justice” can exist as something that could be shared among every single person on earth. Therefore, I admit from the beginning that no “universal apple” could actually exist at all. Moreover, human beings have been thinking about “universality” for more than 2000 years, and I, who is even not a philosopher, has no intention to put myself into that kind of history. On the other hand, it made me want to stop and think about what “universal” could mean for the human species, at this time when not only the internet has become generalized as infrastructure, but also where words such as neural network and deep-learning have started being used in daily conversations.

What I have decided as the content of the exhibition, and the element that would exist within the white cube exhibition area of approximately 180 square meters (approx 15×12m, 6m height) would be the following:

(1) Just one sculpture of a life-sized apple, made by wood and colored with oil paint, titled Apple (Universality) 2019.

(2) And an installation made in the backyard that could be seen through a hole made in the exhibition wall, titled About Apple and Universality, which is an installation based on a research.

Above two are what will consist of my exhibition.

For (2), there will be a video work in which I am currently in preparation with a programmer. It will document the process of “attempting to derive the most ‘general apple’ among the countless ‘apples’ that currently exist on the internet with the use of an AI.” I have searched for an “apple” on the internet with various languages, and have purified the images of the “apple (fruit)” with the use of “an AI that recognizes ‘this is an apple’ (and not the computer company nor Iris Apfel)” among the automatically collected database, and then used “an AI that judges the outline of a possible apple and would cut it out,” and completed a database. Then, I had those numerous selected and cut-out images learned through machine-learning (a learning process through a neural network), and then had them searched through a search engine again, and select one “apple” with the possibly highest accuracy, so that I could derive “the most apple-ish apple” from the expansive world of the internet without the intervention of the human hand as much as possible (Data science: Shuto Mikami). One thing that strongly interested me when I saw the continuously generated results of the machine-learning process was that it seemed as though it was tracing the history of art. As though it began from the perspectival altarpieces of Jan van Eyck, then proceeded to the smooth gradation invented by Leonardo da Vinci, then went through the brush-strokes of Rubens and the light and darkness of Velázquez, Turner, Goya, Impressionism, and then the new era since the appearance of Cezanne (who was actually called the painter of apples), which then proceeded to cubism by incorporating the ontology of three-dimensions. For me, it seemed as though the whole story of humanity and art history was being re-enacted when I looked at the machine-learning process of an apple. Although this research itself would not be reflected in my sculpture, I implemented this research from my desire of wanting to see with my own eyes how “universality” may perhaps appear and take its distance from the “generality” achieved by percolating a database that was derived from the vast internet.

That is to say, my aim for this exhibition is to consider what “universality” could be at the current time by using the motif of an apple from various perspectives including “generality.” Honestly, I feel it is not myself who proactively came up with this idea, but the apple made me think of it instead. Apples have the nature of “self-unfruitfulness,” which means they can only accept pollination from other cultivars. Apples are fundamentally programmed to become farther from pure-blood and have their own destination set to become diversified. It has lead me to think that perhaps diversity is inclusive of “universality,” and this “self-unfruitfulness” has half-automatically driven me deeply think of “what universality could be.”

The “apple,” which came to Japan just 150 years ago as part of the Western culture, did not originally have a Japanese word that would correspond to it and was translated into a word called Ringo. Another thing that was installed in Japan around the same time but originally did not have a Japanese word was “art,” which was translated as the word Bijutsu. Perhaps it is not at all a coincidence that a replay of the art history occurred when an apple was learned through a neural network. Among the two which both have a rather new history of 150 years, it could be too much of a leap to call one of the two as an Alter Ego, but is it just me who thinks it is still worth thinking about and taking a glimpse at the vaguely appearing red fruit in the darkness, as though trains that are running at night next to each other and are dimly lightening up at each other?

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