

Lee Ufan Retrospective Related Event

Dialogues: Architecture as Art and Art as Architecture

Lee Ufan × Ando Tadao

Sunday, December 25, 2022

Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art Auditorium

Ando Tadao Profile

Architect

Born in Osaka, Japan in 1941, Ando Tadao established himself as a self-taught architect with the founding of Tadao Ando Architect & Associates in 1969. He taught as a visiting professor at Yale University, Columbia University, and Harvard University. Ando Tadao has also been teaching as a professor at Tokyo University since 1997 and a professor emeritus since 2003. He has won numerous awards worldwide including the Pritzker Architecture Prize. Ando Tadao also received the 2010 Order of Culture.

As part of the programs held for the Lee Ufan Retrospective, Lee Ufan has engaged in a Dialogues series with intellectuals from around the world. In the sixth dialogue of this series, we invited Architect Ando Tadao to sit down with Lee Ufan.

The dialogue between these two began with Ando Tadao's impression of Lee Ufan's solo exhibition at the Palace of Versailles in 2014. Ando Tadao began with his sentiments about the difficult task of envisioning an exhibition beyond words in such a magnificent space overflowing with history and tradition. He built on these sentiments by shifting the topic to his own experiences in France and his first encounter with contemporary art. Ando explained how he had found himself right in the middle of the May 1968 civil unrest in France while living in Paris. He even expressed the admiration he felt for the tremendous fighting spirit of the French when seeing the student protests.

In 2022, Lee Ufan opened Lee Ufan Arles to exhibit his work in the South of France. In preparation to open this space, Lee Ufan consulted with Ando Tadao on a variety of things. Upon its completion, Ando paid tribute to Lee for creating a space that encourages thought in the viewer on a variety of topics while giving the impression that he has done almost nothing at all to it. Ando even expressed how the mystique of Lee Ufan Arles emerging from magnificent art is a power that photographs cannot capture.

The conversation then shifted to the Lee Ufan Museum in Naoshima, Kagawa, which came into fruition through a collaboration between Ando and Lee. Fukutake Soichiro wanted to build a museum unlike anything else in the world. Moved hearing Fukutake's passion for this dream, Ando accepted Fukutake's offer to design the Benesse House Museum.

Ando shared his belief that a museum cannot succeed with artists alone but also requires faith from the clients. Even though the Benesse House Museum attracts many people from around the world today, almost no one visited it for the first five years. Ando explained how it took time for the space to grow into the booming success that it is today.

The plans for the Lee Ufan Museum did not originally have a concrete pillar 40 centimeters thick that towers 18 meters into the air. This was an idea proposed by Lee. Ando expressed the technical difficulty of achieving such a structure saying, "I was really worried."

However, everyone involved apparently rejoiced at the spectacular space realized once the pillar was complete after overcoming so many difficult challenges.

"The pillar is a wonderful addition, and it really is Lee's pillar." Ando said.

Lee explained, "The idea first came to me thanks to the line stretching horizontally across the architecture behind designed by Ando. I felt the addition of a vertical line would give the space movement."

Lee and Ando have continued to collaborate with one another even after the Lee Ufan Museum was completed in 2010. The arch in Naoshima today came about when Lee expressed to Ando his desire to try to build the same kind of arch in Naoshima as he attempted at the Palace of Versailles. Lee seems to have spoken passionately stating, "I wanted to build something with presence and imagination different from the one I did in France."

Ando describes Lee Ufan as a treasure of the world. He believes it is important to travel to the site and see Lee Ufan's work in person to experience the emotions brought by the space.

Ando must make compromises with reality as an architect, while he feels an artist's lifeblood is risking everything on their work. When asked if he thinks the earthy things are always secondary to art, Lee responds by explaining that it must be similar to the way an architect views things. Lee believes in particular that what an artist does is essentially the same care Ando takes to design structures that transcend the simple necessities and convenience of the people living there.

Lee even went as far as to say he would not have done the museum in Naoshima without Ando. Originally, another project had been planned for the location where the Lee Ufan Museum stands. After Lee shared his desire to use that site, Ando convinced those around him to make it happen.

In Arles, a person cannot acquire a building that is designated a cultural asset. As Lee worked to tackle these difficult circumstances, Ando became instrumental in offering a wide

range of advice. Lee described how fortunate he feels to have such a close and almost telepathic relationship with an outstanding architect who understands the work he has done throughout his career.

At the beginning, Ando discussed his memories of the May 1968 civil unrest that rocked Paris, but Lee gave insight into how his experiences during the turbulence of those times from the late 1960s through the 1970s is the basis for his retrospective. The work is initially destructive and a departure. Lee sees this rebellious approach that was sometimes aggressive as what launched his career. The spaces tremble with arrangements vibrating with resonance between things and with the space. Lee calls these relationships forth with his work. Lee describes demonstrating this intention as his goal when creating an exhibition. Ando commented that the Lee must live a long life after artist explained that he feels he has just recently stepped up to the starting line.

Ando reflected with Lee on Gutai artist as well as modernism, John Cage, Takemitsu Toru, Kawara On, and Richards Serra, their first encounters with these artists' works, and the importance of experiencing, seeing and thinking about that which you do not understand. Unlike studies in school, the way to appreciate art cannot be taught. Ando says it is vital for everyone to repetitively look to find their own unique approach for viewing and thinking about things they do not understand.

Ando expressed surprise when seeing Lee's piece arranged in the circular terrace of the Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art exclaiming, "Wow, it can be used like that too!" He says that the secret to long life is to stimulate your curiosity and nurture intellect in this way. Ando advocates art and art museums as the means to train this intellect. Even without trying to do the impossible of seeing everything, people should search for artworks that pull at their heart strings, and then really look but with the heart rather than eyes. This is the way Ando advises people to appreciate art.

"Are artists constantly thinking about art day and night?" Ando asked.

"It becomes habitual." Lee responds. "Although, that's a ridiculous way to describe it." Lee goes on with optimism, "There are not very many artists active at the forefront worldwide, but those who are do have something in common. They all have cultivated the same sensibility. When we happen to see one another from time to time, we never need to talk very long. We get a sense of each other's reaction to our recent work simply by their expressions and demeanor. That's why an artist is always thinking about what to do next when alone. It's different from being diligent. It's more like it becomes a way of life. Isn't that true for you too, Ando?"

“Museums are amazing places because it gives an instant glimpse of works born from those excruciating ideas. It’s a waste to let these pieces pass by with only one glance.” Ando remarks.

Both Lee and Ando had mutual acquaintances like Kawara On and Richard Serra. Lee summarized an episode in which Richard Serra described Ando as an obscure architect. In this case, Lee explains, Serra surely meant obscure as having a certain ambiguity, but he has no doubt Serra was not only referring to his fascination of Ando’s architecture but also himself.

“Everyone says they don’t get it or understand, but obscurity is the job of all great artists. The ambiguity is what evokes thought. That’s what generates the wealth of emotions. We learn there are other people besides ourselves. This revelation is important.” Ando adds. “Teaching people things with concrete answers and making them think are two completely different things.”

“It really is.” Lee agrees. Modern times have seen the dawn of AI and greater convenience everywhere, but Lee sees the rush to stay ahead as an extremely ill-chosen pursuit. Tempered thought and experience are vital, even if that means making mistakes. This is true in art, at the theater, with music, and at the library. Places where we can use our bodies to experience things are important and so is discovery in the obscurity of the unknown. Lee emphasizes exhibitions as the reason for things to exist. “People begin to think when the unknown and ambiguous collide. Exhibitions are spaces where that happens.” Lee explains.

“When I see your works, Lee, I feel as if I am hearing music.” Ando says.

Ando believes time spent at museums of art is the time for these experiences. It is a time for us to encounter different sensibilities. The Palace of Versailles may be far away, but the Museum of Art in Kobe is right next door. This is the perfect chance to visit such a place over and over again. Ando passionately continued to explain the importance of standing before works of art with your own unique sense of distance.

The intense dialogue between these two giants was filled with many superbly captivating episodes. The audience really got a sense of the rich interaction between Ando and Lee who have a relationship built on mutual respect. The hour passed by quickly in an auditorium filled with joy.

Dialogue report: Kobayashi Tadashi (Curator, Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art)



ヴェルサイユ宮殿 李禹煥展 2014年6月17日~11月2日

