

'The world's largest financial newspaper, with a daily circulation exceeding 1.73 million copies'; publisher of the Nikkei Index.

Column by Ryu Niimi, "A Revered Friend with a Complex View on Germany"

English Translation

At Musashino Art University, where I work, we have a wonderful system called Visiting Professorship. This allows us to invite experts in art and design from abroad to stay for a week and conduct classes, lectures, and workshops for our students. I have invited many friends who are experts, such as museum curators, art historians, and designers, to conduct classes.

Just recently, I invited my esteemed friend Mr. C. Raman from Basel, Switzerland. As his name suggests, his late father was from Kerala in southern India. His father met his mother at an art school in Stuttgart, got married, and had him as their only child. His mother, who was also a vibrant person and active as a designer, passed away recently. Her father, or rather, his grandfather, was Oskar Schlemmer, a teacher at the Bauhaus, a renowned comprehensive art school in Germany during the 20th century.

The Bauhaus was established after World War I by the very democratic Weimar Government in impoverished, recovering Germany. It was an art university created to produce user-friendly and affordable designs and housing for the new mass society. It gathered 20th-century artists like shining stars teaching there but was closed down by the Nazis and had a short life. However, its role in the 20th century was immensely significant. Both for the artistic advancements of the 20th century and the substantial development of art education up to the present day.

In the 21st century, the artist I consider most important for this new era is Oskar Schlemmer. He was a sculptor and painter, and moreover, he opened incredibly unique and experimental theatre and dance workshops at the Bauhaus.

The 21st century is not only about coexistence with nature and environmental conservation, but it is also a century in which we must deeply consider and practice the relationship between the human body and nature in order to survive together with nature. This is not just about the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic arose as a rebuttal from the nature that humans have mistreated so far.

Raman and I are considering organizing the first retrospective exhibition of Oskar Schlemmer in Japan. This may be my final role as a curator, and if it is not, I am concerned it could hinder my juniors' development.



I often meet him in various places in Europe, in Berlin, Basel, and other locations. And in Japan, in Tokyo and Oita. This time, he wants to go to Hiroshima, so we plan to go there.

Kerala, in the south of India, seems like a wonderful place. It is his second home, with many relatives, and he always invites me to visit. I jokingly reply, "I don't want to go to a place where the caste system still remains, not even in my next life." He responds, "If the government would help everyone, the caste system would disappear, but it remains because they do not support sufficiently."

Schlemmer was labelled a 'degenerate' artist by the Nazis, prohibited to work as an artist, and died in extreme poverty and illness. In the end, he left behind the sad "Window Paintings," which he painted from the shadows of people reflected in the window of the buildings next door.

Therefore, he, C. Raman Schlemmer himself, partly dislikes one of his homelands, Germany. He rarely speaks German. He is a Hindu, and while he is not a pure vegetarian, he does not eat meat. Although I am also a peculiar person who does not easily get along with others, he is one of my best few esteemed respectful friends.