

## Why was BankART1929 established?

I would like to sketch out the reasons behind the founding of BankART1929 and trace its subsequent evolution.

BankART1929 remains the foremost Creative City project promoting the re-development of Yokohama's architectural patrimony, its flourishing artistic and culture scene and inner city regeneration. With the goal of establishing creative clusters throughout the Yokohama's metropolitan area, the BankART team have built new networks, embracing the entire spectrum of artistic and cultural spheres. We have created a space in downtown Yokohama in which performance, architecture, music and the fine arts related events have a viable platform, while at the same time offering studio spaces, adult education courses, café-pub a book shop, and facilities for creative endeavours. Since its inception, BankART has been actively involved in producing hundred of cultural events annually.

### **A Historical Overview of Yokohama**

Under pressure from Admiral Perry, the Tokugawa Shogunate was forced to open up several ports to foreign ships to enable international trade. Among those chosen was Yokohama - at that time a backwater dock some 25 kilometres southwest of Tokyo. Yokohama was quickly to become the nexus for foreign trade, an opening to the outer world as such. In the immediate aftermath of the port's opening a railway connection linking Tokyo's Shinbashi and Yokohama's Sakuragicho was laid down, while a concession in the Kannai district was given the go ahead. I recall reading that the three pivotal events in Yokohama's history were: the opening of the port (1858), the Great Kanto Earthquake (1923); and the air raids during the Pacific War (1944-45). The first of these came about as a consequence of demands made by a foreign power; the second was a natural disaster, while the third was due to damage inflicted by a military force. These were the determining factors in the creating of that source of phenomenal energy, which is the Yokohama of today, a city that has constantly transformed itself through destruction and renewal. Yokohama is unique among world cities in that its starting point for its evolution into a world-class city was due to an entirely man-made decision: its port was forcibly opened up to the outside world, thus kick-starting a process of urbanisation - a recurring factor in Yokohama's history: Foreign influences became increasingly evident in every facet of the city's life: architecture, street design, gastronomy and clothing. Grippled with an enterprising spirit, Yokohama transformed itself within a timeframe of a mere 50 years from a backwater port into a major financial hub and a well-to-do modern metropolis. Nonetheless, as can be seen in this photograph of the immediate aftermath of the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923, we can observe its location's inherent vulnerability to natural disasters. Overnight the city was utterly destroyed. In light of its devastation, Yokohama was to concentrate on becoming a fire-resistant city. When it came to

reconstruction, due consideration was forthwith given to proper construction materials and fire preventive measures. This engendered that perennial and overriding tendency for innovative design so characteristic of the city. Yokohama rose from the ashes with numerous buildings using reinforced concrete, based on the model of western construction techniques. Within two decades, however, many of those buildings were once again turned into rubble following the American air raids. While all wooden structures were burned to a cinder, those constructed with reinforced concrete were by and large able to withstand the bombardments. Another determining factor in Yokohama's survival was that the American Air Force deliberately avoided using the incendiary bombs that were used to such devastating effect elsewhere. This was because the American authorities had already envisaged making Yokohama the headquarters for the future government of Japan, thus sparing the city's architectural patrimony and port facilities.

### **The Dawn of Citizenship**

Despite its traumatic past, Yokohama has persisted, endowed with a particular DNA make-up that has enabled it to make a great leap into the future. The city prides itself in its sense of survival. Our Creative City Project is but an extension of this deeply entrenched desire to continually regenerate this historic city.

### **An Autonomous Yokohama**

In the 150 years since this erstwhile backwater port opened up, Yokohama's population has sprouted to almost 3,680,000. While some outlying districts have been inhabited since the Kamakura period (1185-1333) - for example, the Kanazawa-ward - most of Yokohama's citizens live in the large-scale residential communities in the suburban developments on the city's hillsides, like those in the Aoba and Tsuzuki wards. With a yearly population increase of almost a 100,000 newcomers, the city has exerted an astonishingly strong magnetic attraction. The desire to create a highly efficient urban environment is something that runs in the city's DNA, and is something of an inherited skill. Public work schemes initiated in 1963 by Ichio Asukata, the then mayor, and further advanced by city planners the calibre of Akira Tamura, resulted in the creation of what is since known as the six major initiatives. A corollary to this process was the notion of Yokohama becoming 'autonomous.' One particular episode in this awakening consciousness of Yokohama's potential was the underground highway running from Yoshidabashi-bridge. In neighbouring Tokyo, as the central government were erecting highways over rivers in preparation the Tokyo Olympic Games (1964), they also set their minds to constructing an underground highway network in Yokohama. Despite the hastily drawn-up plans, it was nonetheless decided to undertake such a monumental project

without proper consultation. The Yokohama city authorities put up fierce resistance to this inner-city highway network. Ultimately, the plan was given the green light, but not first without the application of extremely onerous digging methods. While maintaining cooperative ties with the central government in Tokyo, Yokohama nonetheless established its own way of doing things, and pursued its autonomous approach. Against such a backdrop, these six major initiatives have over the last 40 years steadily been the motor to implement change, and the bedrock for the completion of numerous large-scale projects such as the Kouhoku New Town District, the Bay Bridge, the Minatomirai area and such.

### **Yokohama in Fifty Years Time**

Mayor Nakada stepping into office in 2002 was timely: the city was just beginning to lose its way, suffering a drop in vitality after four decades of steady expansion. Takeru Kitazawa, who assumed Akira Tamura's position, assisted Nakada in his stewardship. On becoming a councillor in Yokohama, Kitazawa, a Tokyo University professor and former urban planning chief, became deeply involved in Yokohama's future plans. I suppose his major concern was the direction in which Yokohama was heading. While the city undoubtedly overcame many hurdles in the past, what major issues will confront upcoming generations? What will motivate them to regenerate their city?

### **Creative City Project**

With a constantly increasing number of vacant lots and properties in the previously bustling downtown district of Bashamichi, public opinion began clamouring for regeneration of the area, particularly in light of the success of the Minatomirai complex and the thriving business activity close to Yokohama station. Consequently, preparatory measures for the Creative City Project were launched, enrolling the city's formidable cultural forces: In the process historic buildings were reconverted and street life revitalised. Kitazawa-san was at that time at the helm of the Urban Planning Bureau, in which urban design was to encompass the entire cityscape, and for which he initiated and actively promoted a set of remarkable initiatives including architectural projects and soft programs, under Mayor Nakada's stewardship, that were to act as a forerunner for the Creative City Project. In terms of the four major indicators Kitazawa had in mind for Creative City Yokohama, one can see, in practice that he painstakingly prepared the ground for the Inner Harbour Scheme, and that those procedures he set in motion would ultimately lead to the foundation of the Yokohama of tomorrow.

#### The Four Great Projects

- 1: Yokohama National Art Park
- 2: Yokohama Creative City Clusters

#### 3: Yokohama as Image Culture City

#### 4: Yokohama Triennale Series

The first, the National Art Park (NAP) is a surprisingly neat concept, whose core idea is the creation of an initiative whereby Yokohama city would work in conjunction with the national authorities in redeveloping the vast areas of land surrounding Yokohama bay that had been developed by the central administration. By enlisting the national authorities cooperation, emphasis was firmly on public parks and cultural facilities, and not on business and industry. The Shinko Pier complex, re-furbished as a venue for the 2008 Triennale; ZOU-NO-HANA TERRACE, conceived as part of the Yokohama Port Opening 150th anniversary project are all successful examples. In collaborating closely with the national authorities, the aim was to simultaneously reduce expenditure and enhance the harbour's overall functions through the creation of public spaces. The main thrust of the NAP project is to continue offering Yokohama's citizens a prosperous living environment.

The second touchstone, the Creative City Cluster project, is also of central importance for BankART1929. It entails creating new inner-city communities - not in the old-fashioned sense of an over-reliance on one's neighbours - but rather of facilitating a series of programmes that will ultimately lead to building of new residential areas. Promoted by City Hall, in conjunction with various community-based groups and the central authorities, a chain reaction ensued with the result that the number of those involved in the various creative spheres working in close proximity to BankART is now more than a thousand.

The third indicator is that of Yokohama as a city committed to Image Culture. At the outset, focus was primarily on the film industry's content-based industries. The company that eventually set up in Yokohama was to suffer setbacks due to the worsening economic conditions. Those enterprises involved with video and computer games, which had gone so far as to even buy sites, also pulled out given the downturn. Tokyo University of Arts Graduate School of Film and New Media then decided to re-locate its campus to Yokohama and establish its faculties of Film, Media Arts and Animation in the city's downtown district. While EIZONE, (Yokohama Image Culture City Festival) initiated in 2007 and running for three successive years, along with CREAM International Festival for Arts and Media in 2010 went some distance in consolidating Yokohama's reputation as an Image Culture City, further steps are required. Andrei Tarkovsky pointed out the metaphorical nature of image in his films: one can observe this again and again in the constant presence of water. Seeing that Yokohama is endowed with abundant water resources, I am sure that it would be a powerful incentive were it to adopt the harbour as its icon, in effect calling to mind a locality where 'image' plays a critical role in defining the city. It would lead us away from an

image of an inflexibly structured city towards a more fluid one, one that embraces diversity.

The fourth factor, the Yokohama Triennale, plays an integral and positive role in the overall Creative City concept. As a festival-like event held every three years, the Triennale serves as a means of consolidating various city-planning initiatives in the day-to-day lives of Yokohama citizens, embracing both infrastructural and cultural elements. In parallel to these initiatives, it provides an incentive towards novel developments and a renewed city environment. The results of the last three triennales have been significant: the redeveloped districts on the waterfront have been the focal point of its activities. To cite but some examples : the newly-built Pacifico Yokohama Convention Center and the re-constructed Red Brick Warehouses were prominent venues for the 2001 Triennale, derelict warehouses on the Yamashita pier were renovated for the 2005 Triennale, and the 2008 Triennale saw the construction of the Shinko Pier.

Its vibrant program is marked by phenomenal progress particularly considering its origins, and the manner in which these four interweaving yet distinct strands complement each other. Results are everywhere to be seen: ranging from small-scale initiatives on the brink of breakthrough to those employing a more flexible approach to consolidating their presence on the ground.

As Kitazawa-san saw it, the decision to initiate the Creative City project, before tackling the Inner Harbour scheme was both strategically crucial and a very sound one. What he was underlining was the necessity of a vibrant cultural sphere so as to ensure the city's survival, and not how the city would face its major infrastructural challenges over the next fifty years. I believe that much can be gained from embracing the unknown, and of the need to reflect and take stock of prevailing circumstances. This probing approach was and remains inherent to the Creative City Project.

### **BankART and its Beginnings**

Established in 2004, BankART ranks among the prominent driving forces behind Yokohama's urban planning. It was originally located above ground at Bashimichi station on the recently constructed Minatomirai line. BankART was initially housed in two historic buildings, both former banks and built in 1929. Kitazawa-san's response to my searching question during our preliminary vetting as to why we should use two premises at a distance from each other was: "Please work together with the city." This answer epitomises our fundamental approach to whatever project we undertake, that we do not use art for art's sake, but rather regard it as a starting point for city planning. After establishing ourselves - and not without

toing and froing between two buildings - we made our mark on its citizens, the architecture, the shops, the city's walls and vacant lots. The programmes we instigated have mostly been directly connected to city-life.

The first to come to mind is the opening of the building we now occupy. Though not quite until midnight, we do keep our doors open until 11:00 pm, until pub-closing time, thus enabling not only those attending the various events to frequent the building but also the general public to use the building as though it were a public facility. At that time, I wrote the following:

"We would like BankART to be like a train station. Just as a European train station functions as a communal space where one can drink a coffee or enjoy a beer, where buskers can freely play their music, where some even take a nap, while others might occasionally get into a fight, where everybody can comfortably pass their time. Our ultimate aim is to create a structure that embraces all these needs. Yokohama is city of commerce, where people from all over Japan and overseas congregate, which nurtures a significant artistic community, where the economy is constantly growing, where information rapidly circulates, in sum a place where trading of all sorts occurs. We would like to work together with those who have something to express, and with those who support them. United, we would like to convert the economic structure of this city so that we can all earn a livelihood here. We would like BankART to be the research station for these endeavours."

For those readers interested in learning more about BankART, please refer to its website [www.bankart1929.com](http://www.bankart1929.com), or alternatively BankART Life II, published in English translation in 2009.

### **Bankart's Response**

Bank ART's early days were far from plain sailing given that within four months of moving into our new premises, the former Fuji Bank in Bashamichi, we were asked to vacate the building because the Tokyo University Media Faculty wished to use it for its Yokohama campus. An ominous mood ensued as a result of this perceived abuse of trust, and we, as the party working in the building, could not just simply choose to ignore the predicament we found ourselves in.

That said, however, City Hall were delighted with their arrival, and let us know that the very fact that Tokyo University campus was attracted to coming to Yokohama was partly due to our efforts in getting Creative City Yokohama off the ground. Whereupon we decided to hand over the building as requested. We did, however, set down three pre-conditions:

The first was that our new premises be within walking distance; the second that we have as much space at our disposal, and finally that we re-locate without having to wait. City Hall took all our concerns on board, and immediately set about brokering the move. They located our current premises, the BankART Studio NYK, and aggressively negotiated with Nippon Yusen

its new owners, hastily ensured a supplementary budget and undertook all the necessary repair works so that the building could be occupied by the end of the December. BankART Studio NYK opened in January of 2005. Refurbishing and repairs at the former Fuji Bank premises were completed by April, thus enabling the Tokyo University to open their campus immediately. Given the challenges, we could both accomplish what needed accomplished remarkably well.

### **Chain Reactions**

About a year or so after establishing ourselves in our new premises, the Mori Building (a former Teisan Warehouse Project in the Kitanaka district) just across from BankART was designated for re-development. Given that reconstruction work wasn't due to begin until some two years later, we were asked whether it would be possible to use the offices on the street-side of the building in the interim. The owners agreed on condition that we pay the property tax and a minimal administrative charge. The lease was solely for a fixed period. We then approached various young artists and architect groups with the idea of renting out affordable, small-sized studios on the ground floor to the artists, and the larger atelier spaces on the 2nd and 3rd floors to the architects. Initially, we contacted some sixty different groups and individuals, and by the time of the second viewing about 50 of them decided to become tenants. Thanks to the affordable rents and the expedient manner in which the owners of the Mori Building responded to our proposals, a small miracle occurred: Kitanaka BRICK & WHITE was to open its doors within three months. What made the move even more attractive was the fact that Mikan, an architect group, promptly decided to lease an office there. The only pre-requisites for getting this project off the ground were that we succeeded in attracting a good creative team, and that it naturally fermented itself. The Kitanaka residents organised open studio days, opening their ateliers to the public, developing in the process into competent communicative teams. Another remarkable feature of this project was how the city authorities positively responded to this proactive attitude taken by the Kitanaka residents. Realising the short-term nature of the lease, they foresaw and opened ZAIM, so that the artists could move immediately to a new premises once their lease expired. Notwithstanding the fact that it was subject to public tender, a good third of the residents of Kitanaka BRICK & WHITE relocated to ZAIM. City Hall also provided financial assistance by subsidising the initial costs of setting up office there. Yokohama took an extremely pro-active stance in attracting those working in the artistic and cultural sphere to settle in the inner city, thus engendering a chain reaction.

### **Private Sector Involvement**

The private sector has equally played a crucial role to, notably with the Honcho 45 building, popularly known as Shigokai. Given the sense of instability engendered by the short-term leases available at ZAIM, the architect groups based in Kitanaka were reluctant to move. As we were responsible in attracting them to Kitanaka in the first place, we tried to find another space to which they could relocate. No matter how hard they tried, we were unable to come across one with similarly favourable conditions. Eventually, they were to re-locate to the Honcho-biru, situated right in front of BankART, whose owner showed understanding for the way we operated. When he agreed to leasing the fourth and fifth floors of the building designated for redevelopment on the same conditions as Kitanaka, we were at once overjoyed and yet somewhat daunted by the prospect. The term 'private sector involvement' fittingly describes this significant development.

Up until that juncture, we had often presented lectures entitled: 'Potential for Private Sector administered Public Facilities,' and BankART had acted as a mediator between the public and private sectors, continually endeavouring to maximise the potential of both through a series of corresponding programs.

### **BankART's Objectives**

Initially instigated in 2004 on an experimental basis for 2 years, then extended for a further 2 years, BankART is now about to complete its seventh year in operation. Though still a long way from accomplishing our original objectives, we are more determined than ever in furthering the Creative City project, and, with the following self-imposed objectives in mind, maintain our current stable management practices. BankART's long-term goals are:

- 1: Creating a viable economic basis for the venture.
- 2: Extending our network to other cities in Japan and overseas.
- 3: Enhancing awareness of the pioneering nature of the Creative City Cluster project.

BankART has currently an annual revenue intake of some 80 million yen, steadily increasing year on year, generated through a diversity of activities and programmes, ranging from the café cum pub, the book-shop, adult education courses and rental studios at BankART Studio NYK, along with co-ordinating and producing more than 200 events, exhibitions, symposiums and such annually. Thanks to this solid economic footing and the subsidies received from Yokohama city, we have continually been able to present a challenging program while building up a secure business base.

We receive more than a hundred fact-finding missions from Japan and abroad every year, many of these from art initiative organisations operational in similar fields, notably organising conferences and co-ordinating publishing projects with the

support of the Agency for Cultural Affairs. Of late, we launched a novel and on-going Japanese-Korean exchange project, *A Contemporary Sequel for the Joseon-Korean diplomatic expeditions*, which has gained momentum through its deepening approach.

Of the original 53 project groups that occupied Kitanaka BRICK & WHITE, comprising of 253 persons in all, 17 of them moved to the Honcho-biru. Another successful project we promoted was *Food and Contemporary Art* in conjunction with restaurant owners in the Noge, Bashamichi and Hatsuko-Hinode districts. Availing of unused public spaces in the city, vacant lots, rooftops, waterways, the Bashamichi Station and the entrance of Yokohama City Hall, *the Landmark Project* was an effort to bring Yokohama's citizens to overlooked areas of the city. We are continually striving to devise various schemes to reinvigorate the metropolitan area.

### **BankART's Outlook for the Future**

Given that 2012 will see BankART face into its 8th year, I would like to jot down a few ideas as to what the future might hold in store. Over the years I have published several papers on this topic and would like to quote from one of them:

"I've always believed that BankART has been fortunate: Compared with other municipal organisations, we have by no means better budgets, salaries and facilities, and yet I have to say that we are an autonomous venture with far less constraints. Moreover, the city's administrative bodies have invariably shown every willingness to help us in our endeavours and it has been a genuinely enjoyable and inspirational experience thus far. Yet, we face an uncertain future, and have to ask ourselves how we will adapt. It would hardly do for us to become complacent about our achievements, accepting the prevalent top-down arrangements.

With recent case studies New York or Berlin, we can observe how various art initiatives have actually played a determining role in the shape those cities have taken. Positive outcomes are even to be seen in those areas and buildings originally squatted, where local communities, the private and public sectors in conjunction with the city administration have worked hand in hand, leading to a visible improvement of the city's cultural standards and living environment. However, such a modus operandi does not correspond to current conditions in Japan. In Yokohama, for instance, the pattern to date has been that City Hall takes the initiative to set things in motion, followed by a working period in partnership with the private sector, until such time that the administration is fully handed over. The problem is what will happen after the transfer of responsibility. To be blatantly clear on the issue, BankART, too, inevitably needs to quickly face up to this reality and become a fully-fledged private sector organisation. While continuing to collaborate and work closely on joint projects with the administration

and be the recipient of assistance, it is of all the more pressing that BankART finds its own premises, expands and becomes financially independent. As I commented at the symposium for Administrative Systems: "A Museum established without incentives will disappear in the same fashion." These words confront BankART with an ultimatum. I believe that BankART has entered its second phase, whereby we will work on even closer terms with Yokohama, think beyond the frame, gradually transform ourselves, turn our weaknesses into strengths, and benefit from our manifold experiences of working in this city so as to eventually break out and stand on our own two feet. Unfazed, I would like BankART to face up to the challenges and opportunities ahead."

On a final note, Kitazawa-san passed away in December of 2009. I would like to conclude this essay by quoting from my comments in his book of condolences.

### **Ideas (Aspirations) and Practice (Working Projects)**

I wonder what Kitazawa-san foresaw for Yokohama? Why did he pursue the idea of turning it into a Creative City? When the Tokugawa Shogunate took the momentous step to open the port 150 years ago, Yokohama was regarded in strategic terms. Following the Pacific War, the city administration resolved to discard the past and aimed to create a future metropolis. The question was and remains: How and to what extent the Japanese government was to be involved, and how was Yokohama to attain and maintain its autonomy? I am of the belief that Kitazawa-san was genuinely concerned about the ramifications of the relationship between Yokohama city and central government. His four principal pillars for the turning Yokohama into a Creative City clearly illustrate the complexity of his approach towards urban planning. As a city planner, he was endowed both with the drive to get things done in real terms along with a profound understanding of all the details involved in urban planning, and at the same time the ability to grasp artistic or multi-layered virtual realities. Incorporating all these qualities, he showed the way forward with his conception of urban environments, robust and yet adaptable, complex and yet comprehensible. While evaluating the city around him either micro- or macroscopically, ever turning his aspirations into tangible realities and yet always willing to go back to the drawing board, Kitazawa san's remains at our backs, encouraging us from afar to persevere in bringing his dreams to fruition.

Osamu Ikeda  
Director BankART 1929