

Life Scroll 1991- <http://www.kentchiba.com/chibaHP/LifeScroll.html>

Life Scroll is a highly detailed and sustained drawing using a pen on paper, which continues as a daily discipline. The drawing started in 1991 and is now 19 meters long. My fluctuations of expression between my late 30s and the present day are evidenced in this scroll.

In my late thirties when I started to draw the scroll, I felt and suffered from strange pressure on my ear drums from the inside my skull. I got a weird obsession to release the pressure from the brain where numerous delusional images emerged one after another and acted freely. These obsessions actually made me start drawing the scroll.

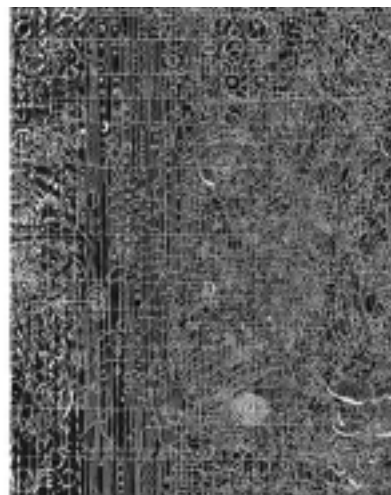
The reason why I chose a scroll format was to secure freedom in drawing and to make a continuous exploration to the depth of my subconscious easier on the extended horizontal scroll. If an artist aims for too much accomplishment on the limited canvas, he/she would be trapped by the idea of 'perfection' and artistic freedom would be strained. Needless to say, for artists, free choices should always be given, in drawing or rough sketches, but these techniques are usually considered as temporal.

The reason why I am employing the finest pen is to draw in high detail and as dense as possible and to make the scroll recognized as an independent art work rather than a temporal one. I imposed a rule that the brightest parts have to be expressed with paper blanks and all other gradations from light to dark have to be expressed with hatching of pen strokes. Therefore, the progression of drawing the scroll has become slower and slower.

Hans Knappertsbusch (1888 – 1965), a German conductor, is well-known and still popular for his unique conducting style, especially for the music of Richard Wagner and Anton Bruckner, my favorite composer. I have been curious about one of his episodes that at the concert when he conducted one of Bruckner's symphonies, his performance was getting slower and slower and eventually he could not help stopping the symphony in the middle. This sounds a little bit caricaturized too much, so it is doubtful whether it is true or not but I happened to realize this story is implying a fate of the scroll. My desire is to continue to draw the scroll as far as I can. In other words, the scroll is destined to finish in the middle without accomplishment.



Kasuga Mandala Unknown Artist, (c.13th century, Japan)
Isometric projection and the birds-eye view employed



Collective and Synchronic Detail from Life Scroll (2009)
White Parts and Lines represented in White Negative (Paper Blanks)

However, the delay in the scroll and detailed depicting would invite a criticism that slow drawing cannot catch up images appearing one after another because of a preoccupation in general that the subconscious should emerge in a short moment. These things seem to contradict freedom in drawing I mentioned above. But I would like to point out that if details are once magnified, it would be the same as appearing on a big scale. I think that subconscious can emerge not only in a short moment but also in a delay such as a result of accumulated actions. In the scroll, I would like to emphasize the aspect of subconscious over a long period of time rather than in a short time.

The contents of depiction in a slow tempo cannot be easily expected in advance even by myself as the artist. However, when I started drawing the scroll, I was quite conscious of the narrative side of the scroll and obsessed with drawing the scroll every day to copy it for daily records, which could turn into frames of a time lapse animation later on where the drawing progression of the scroll can be seen. At that time, I actually had vague plans and stories for the next scenes in advance. But after a while, I was gradually released from the obsession with everyday drawing and accordingly, the incidental and spontaneous aspects have become more obvious and the delay in drawing was actually one of the reasons, which made the aspect of narrative weaker. On the other hand, people who are interested in the scroll would still try to seek some narrative. However, I, as the artist, think the time in the scroll is not diachronic but collective and synchronic.



Left : Satellite Imagery of City Right : Electron Microscopy of Crystal Lattices

Microscopy Images shown in the same as a distant view because of a relationally long distance and no notions between objects and a viewer

Furthermore, I feel that I have been drawing in a kind of indeterminate state where it is uncertain whether I depict the scroll by my own initiative or am just forced to do. However, there is one thing possible for me to confirm that in details or in small parts, every drawing expression belongs to me, but the longer the scroll expands, the more I feel alienated. Therefore the scroll has become something like a phenomena outside of myself and I am something like a passive observer.

In fact, that separation between the scroll as an art work and myself as an artist has been one of my main themes how to turn the personal into anonymous or neutral.

In order to reach this objective, I have been trying to release the scroll from linguistic definitions and a narrow range of classification. I guess they would be brought by the trial to combine or juxtapose contradicting elements, for example the combination of the western traditional spatial representation and that of oriental or Japanese. I have come to an expectation that a kind of a chemical reaction could be created beyond my imagination.

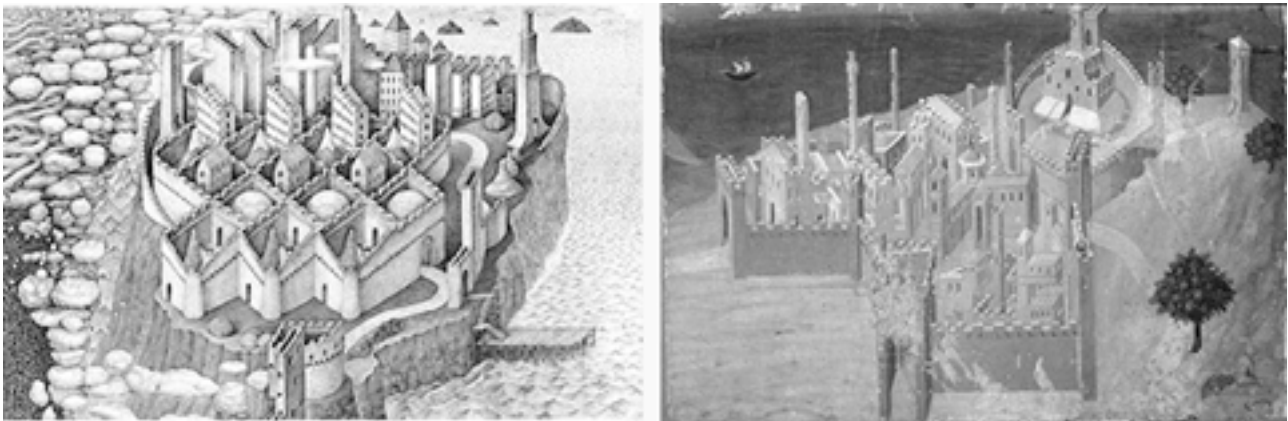
For instance, there is a close approximation between the perspective in art as Western representative view and a snapshot because of the circumstances under which the snapshot was taken. The point is that confirmation of positions and time of the perspective and the snapshot would suggest the viewer and photographer's physical actions and indicate their bodies' positions.

On the contrary, in the vision of Eastern spatial representation, isometric projection and the birds-eye view e.g., it is hard to know position. It is the same as a photograph taken with a distant view where there are no exchanging notion between objects and the photographer because of distance. Here anonymity and disappearance of watchers are suggested.

For me, the distant view as a anonymous sight is very attractive because, here, the possibility of the visual purity is suggested. If employing the distant view, it would be possible to imply the vision of an anonymous existence or an invisible omnipresent watcher.

Besides that, on the horizontally wide scroll, it is hard to express only by the perspective, as a momentaneous and local vision. So the viewer has to move around in a long space to draw a scroll but that would contradict the principle of the perspective. Meanwhile, these Eastern views, isometric projection and the birds-eye view as the distant sight suits to the scroll format perfectly because of the view-position is already ignored or has disappeared, so that the space and time in the scroll can be extended freely.

However, as mentioned above, I dare to introduce perspective visions as physical visual sensation into the scroll so as to make chemical reactions by matching the distant view as an anonymous sight. I hope others will judge whether this trial is a success or not.



Influences from Ambrogio_Lorenzetti

Left : Castle On the Seashore (1997) From Life Scroll

Right : City By The Sea (c.1340), Ambrogio Lorenzetti

Here, I would like to say that I have got many hints and inspiration from not only ancient Asian art but also great works in pre-renaissance era. The distant view can be found and considered as universal all around the world. Especially, I have been inspired and influenced by Ambrogio Lorenzetti's works. For me, his breathtaking murals in Siena weren't primitive expressions before the time of the establishment of the perspective but complex combinations of anonymous view and personal sight of the individual and suggesting the plentiful potentialities in art for the future, which no artist has reached yet.

Finally, to return to the issue of anonymity in art, considering this scroll as the aggregation of daily drawings for the period of 29 years, this accumulation would have altered the scroll from personal expression to a more neutral one. The scroll is actually variable and consists of ephemeral fragments and can be considered as a stream of consciousness, which will flow in two directions, future and past. I believe that a scroll, in terms of format, can mirror the depths of the subconscious (*Alaya*, in Sanskrit) where the border between individuals, the rules of linguistic division and diachronic time vanishes. In the scroll, time still seems to flow but at the same time, to be synchronic as a cluster of numerous moments, time becomes more ambiguous. I hope the scroll will emerge as if a huge collective moment as a gigantic panorama consisting of numerous scenes where many people, creatures, buildings are shown on an imaginarily distant horizon.

I have heard that Johannes Brahms compared Bruckner's symphonies to giant serpents in sarcasm because of their large size and no particular differences amongst them Brahms thought, but it would be a great honor for me if my small 'Life Scroll' were called the giant serpent.



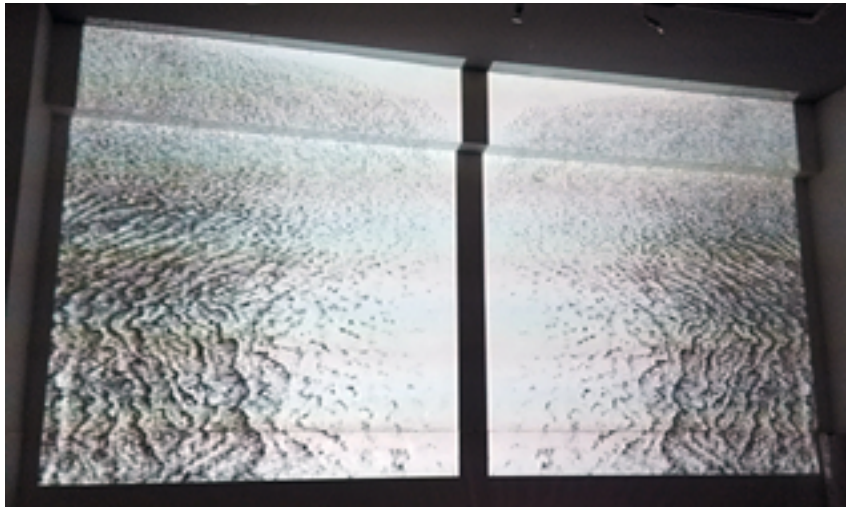
Ambrogio_Lorenzetti_-_Effects_of_Good_Government_(c.1338)

the effort to edit the collection pales in the face of the huge number of drawings

About two Life Scroll animations

'Life Scroll Time-Lapse'(13:25), consisting of frames from daily drawing, shows how the Life Scroll has progressed for 20 years, between 1991 and 2010. (Unfortunately, it is not finished yet to edit the latest drawings and turn them into an animation after 2010 to the present.) The effort to edit the collection pales in the face of the huge number of drawings

In contrast to another animation, Life Scroll Scrolling, this animation represents time as diachronic. Edited with its reflected image, the composition of the animation is symmetric and suggests the changing front view from a boat on the river.



'Life Scroll Scrolling'(5:15) is an animation where the image is magnified and shrunk in scrolling the scroll. But from a distance, the whole scroll appears as an extensive scene close to the horizon and may look like a view of the river bank from the boat on the river. In contrast to 'Life Scroll Time-Lapse', this animation suggests the idea of time as synchronous.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mhdo7iYzVSY>