

The Japan News by The Yomiuri Shinbun

Paul Smith stops by Tokyo to say hello



"Paul's Office"

"Inside Paul's Head"

By Miki Yahsui
Yomiuri Shinbun Staff Writer

An exhibition featuring British designer Paul Smith is under way at The Ueno Royal Museum in Tokyo's Ueno Park. Titled "Hello, My Name is Paul Smith," the show offers a rare opportunity to see how a small shop on a back street of Nottingham developed into the global brand it is today.

"Paul's Office" and "The Design Studio" are re-creations of Smith's office and studio, both located in Covent Garden, London. Here you get a glimpse of Smith's way of seeing and how he continues to create. Crammed with objects such as stuffed toys, masks and cameras, Smith's office reminds you of the excitement you'd feel when opening a box full of toys as a child. The designer says every single item inspires him, whether it's the bellows of an accordion or the texture of a brick wall. He explains that it's important to notice the smallest details and not dismiss items as just "objects."

The design studio is where the multicolored stripes — one of Smith's signature patterns — were born. According to Smith, the stripes are developed by winding colored yarn around cardboard, slowly layering it to create a stripe. The designer said he purposely uses pencils and paints to avoid relying too much on computers. There are approximately 2,800 items displayed in the exhibition, including photographs, paintings, a tricycle presented by a fan and a one-off Mini, which was decorated exclusively for the current exhibition.



Paul Smith standing by his new creation, a one-off Mini

Yomiuri Shinbun photo

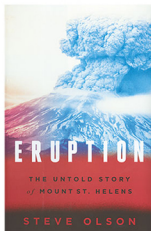
"Hello, My Name is Paul Smith" is at The Ueno Royal Museum in Tokyo's Ueno Park through Aug. 23. It is open from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. (until 5 p.m. on Fridays). Aug. 4 is "Dressed in Pink Night." Starting at 7 p.m., only visitors wearing pink can enter, and admission is free, though they will not receive the souvenir gift for ticket purchases. The exhibition will move to the Matsuzakaya Art Museum in Nagoya from Sept. 11 to Oct. 16.

Sitting on a time bomb the size of a mountain

Eruption: The Untold Story of Mount St. Helens

By Steve Olson
Norton, 300pp

When a mountain begins to bulge, something bad is likely to happen. In the spring of 1980, magma was detected moving beneath Mt. St. Helens volcano between the U.S. cities of Portland and Seattle. As the weeks passed, one side of the mountain began to swell, rising more than 90 meters, like a balloon about to pop. On May 18, it exploded with more energy than an atomic bomb. The blast left the mountain 400 meters shorter and killed 57 people.



Where to Read

Anywhere near a volcano — and in Japan, that means almost anywhere at all.

He correctly warned of a blast like the 1888 eruption of Mt. Bandai in Fukushima Prefecture, which killed more than 450 people.

The middle of the book consists of short, gripping chapters describing the ghastly fates of individual victims, including a woman who was torn apart by the debris-filled shock wave. She was identified by her wedding ring when her arm was found months later. Most victims succumbed in a storm of searing ash.

Next came sudden floods of melted snow and ice from the mountain that washed out 27 bridges, wrecked 200 homes, and left many people in need of rescue.

After so much horror, it comes as a relief to finally read, "By the end of the day... helicopter pilots had flown 138 people, 8 dogs and 1 box constrictor to safety."

— By Tom Baker
Japan News Staff Writer

Manzan price: ¥4,470 plus tax (as of Aug. 3)

Classic waka poems revived on piano

By Michinobu Yanagisawa
Japan News Staff Writer

Ogura Hyakunin-Isshu, a renowned anthology of 100 classical Japanese poems compiled in the 13th century, has been revived as a musical suite with the help of a Western instrument: the piano. Many of the poems in the anthology portray nature's beauty and aristocratic romance.

The twisted combination — of East and West, old and new, literature and music — was created by a London-based composer-pianist, Motoki Hirai. Hirai has shown a strong aspiration to extend the Japanese aesthetic concept of "yugen" — unfathomable subtlety and elegance — through the universal form of music. He is also known for composing and acting as an artistic director, promoting Japanese folklore and collaborating with rakugo storytellers and kabuki performers.

The 43-year-old musician has been on a world tour since March to present his latest work in venues such as the Barbican Centre in London and other prestigious sites in Amsterdam and Vienna. I attended his premiere piano recital, held at Oji Hall in the Ginza district of Tokyo, last month. The hall was packed with approximately 300 people.

The suite, "Tone Poems on 'Hyakunin-Isshu,'" is Hirai's interpret-

ation of 10 of the original 100 pieces of classical waka (31-syllable poems). The selections were made by Kimiko Reizei, who traces her ancestry back to Fujiwara no Teika (1162-1241) — the prominent poet who originally compiled the centuries-old anthology.

Eight of the pieces were created by various poets who described the scenery and soundscapes of the four seasons. The other two were created by Teika and his father, Fujiwara no Shunzei.

Hirai began his performance in a relaxed attitude, gently placing his left arm on the piano — as if he himself were part of the scene. He began with the following poem by Sarumaru Dayu, a legendary poet from around the 8th century:

"HEAR the stag's pathetic call Far up the mountain side, While tramping o'er the maple leaves Wind-scattered far and wide This sad, sad autumn tide."

Hirai slowly played an ambiguous but transparent tune, using only his right hand. The piece, which lasted about two minutes, seemed to display the poet's serene feelings.

The following poem, by Sojo Henjo, a high-ranking Buddhist priest of the 9th century, had a completely different impact:

"OH stormy winds, bring up the clouds, And paint the heavens grey; Least these fair maids of form divine Should angel wings display, And fly far away."

Hirai described the dynamism of the winds by firmly hitting the keys to produce aggressive sounds. The last piece was Teika's poem: "UPON the shore of Matsu-ho For thee I pine and sigh; Though calm and cool the evening air, These salt-pans caked and dry Are not more parched than I!"

The performance, in which Hirai played at a courtly tempo to the illustration of ardent love, was greeted with a roar of applause from the audience.

"The sounds and the rhythm of [Hirai's] pieces were very Oriental and Japanese," said Reizei after the recital. "They demonstrated that waka was intrinsically something to be understood, not by just reading but by listening."

Reizei, who has authored numerous books on waka, pointed out that the classic anthology is not easy to translate into English as it is already a difficult work for Japanese themselves. "Hirai opened a new horizon of promoting the Japanese classic literature to the world, via the common 'language' of piano music," she said.

Hirai told The Japan News that he had improvised each piece partially during his performance. "In a sense, waka is like a universe where I myself am a part of it," he said. "That is why I wanted to keep the music as open as possible to intuition."

Hirai also said that he had used the traditional Japanese musical scale as well as the waka's original syllabic rhythm of 5-7-5-7-7 in the pieces.

Hirai, who is the grandson of composer Kozaburo Hirai — known for such works as "Tombo no Megane" (Dragonflies' Glasses) — said he wanted to continue composing other poems from the Hyakunin-Isshu and perform them repeatedly.

"I believe the infinite world of Hyakunin-Isshu can be more accessible in the abstract form of music. I wish to do it 10 times, so I can complete all 100 pieces," he said.

English translations of Hyakunin-Isshu are taken from "A Hundred Verses from Old Japan (The Hyakunin-Isshu)" by William N. Porter.

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Courtesy of Shogo Matsuda