

Kazuhito Satani

Date of death: May 23, 2008

Field: Art-related worker, art-related worker (other)

Kazuhito Satani, the director of Satani Gallery, died of esophageal cancer on May 23. He was 80. Born in Maizuru, Kyoto Prefecture in 1928, Satani graduated from Fourth High School before enrolling in the economics department at Kyoto University. In 1953, he began working at Norinchukin Bank. After leaving the bank in 1963, Satani was invited to work at Minami Gallery (Nihonbashi, Tokyo) by the gallery's owner Kusuo Shimizu. In 1977, he left the gallery, and established Satani Gallery in Tokyo the following year. In 1982, the gallery moved to Ginza 4-chome. In 2000, it moved to Satani's house in Ogikubo, Tokyo.

In his work at the gallery, Satani presented exhibitions by Japanese artists such as Tatsuo Ikeda, Yukio Nakagawa, Nobuya Abe, Katsuhiro Yamaguchi, Tetsuro Komai, Shusaku Arakawa, Tadaaki Kuwayama, Yutaka Matsuzawa, Kyubey Kiyomizu, Hideko Fukushima, Masaaki Yamada, Isamu Wakabayashi, Genpei Akasegawa, Shigeo Toya, Toeko Tatsuno, and Masato Kobayashi; and foreign artists such as Paul Klee, Max Ernst, Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp, Alberto Giacometti, and Christo. Of particular note was a series of 28 exhibitions titled *Homage to Shuzo Takigawa*, which focused on the relationship between the critic Shuzo Takigawa and various artists. The series was a mark of Satani's deep respect for Takigawa.

According to Satani's memoirs, the experience of working for 20 years at the bank helped him develop a dispassionate judgment and keen perception of the gallery business, and the relationship between society and art. In the following passage, Satani explains his clear ideas regarding the social and cultural *raison d'être* of galleries that handle artworks and art dealers: "It is necessary to be aware that you are handling special goods known as artworks that are related to culture. But what makes this so difficult is that you have to establish a business in culture. Artworks are detached from absolute value and market distribution value, but they are indicators of these things. This means that if you decide to deal with any kind of artwork that makes a profit, you simply become a broker. As I see it, without a clear stance, a gallery or art dealer has no *raison d'être*. Another problem is the question of the artwork's quality. Nothing shines without an awareness of quality. A society with a high-grade culture is a society in which high-quality art exists around people. In other words, it is desirable to have many people who have arrived at a place where they respond, are moved by, understand, and enjoy good-quality artworks. Galleries and art dealers should take

pride in being involved in this kind of society.” (*Art Management: A Practical Guide to Running an Art Galley*, Heibonsha, 1996)

Satani also expressed his views on the significance of a gallery dealing with contemporary art: “For a gallery dealing with contemporary art, there is nothing more important than introducing new and outstanding artists to society. Outstanding artists are witnesses of the era and express the spirit of the times. Galleries have a social obligation to introduce such artists.” As these statements suggest, Satani was notable not only as a gallery owner but also as a sympathizer and supporter of art, particularly contemporary art from both Japan and abroad. The fact that he was profoundly knowledgeable explains his prolific writings, including afterwords for his gallery’s exhibition catalogues and treatises on artists. Satani also commented frequently on art management and cultural administration in the above-quoted book as well as the following publications:

*A Chronicle at 50: The Story of an Art Lover* (Satani Gallery, 1978)

*My Gallery: Together with Contemporary Art* (Satani Gallery Publishing, 1982)

*The Work of a Gallery* (Bijutsu Shuppan, 1988)

*Starting Point: Between Art and Society* (Chusekisha, 2002)

*30 Years of Satani Gallery* (Misuzu Shobo, 2007)

Source: *Yearbook of Japanese Art*, 2009 edition, pp. 432-433

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