Designing Society Through Art

A Collaboration Between Citizens and Cultural Institutions

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The Special Monday Course at

Van Gogh and Gauguin: Reality and Imagination (2016)

The second cohort of Tobira on their graduation day (2016)

The “You too can be a Girl with a Pearl Earring” program (2012)

Preface

This book covers the six years of activities carried out as part of the Tobira Project, a social design project based in museums, the aim of which is to foster communities through art. The project comprises art communicators (called “Tobira”) from all walks of life, curators and university educators, and experts working on the front line; together, these participants harness the museums’ cultural resources and develop activities that bring people closer to artworks, venues, and other people.

The Tobira Project began in 2012, when the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum reopened after renovations, launched by the museum and the neighboring Tokyo University of the Arts. The Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum aims to become a “Doorway to Art,” where visitors of all ages – from babies to the elderly – come to the exhibitions, up-and-coming artists first show their work, and people with disabilities feel welcome. Meanwhile, Tokyo University of the Arts seeks to engage with not just the *material* works on which art is founded, but also with art as an *enterprise*. It endeavors to increase opportunities for people to participate in society through art and discover new values.

We believe that in today’s Japan, which is said to be a mature society, we must henceforth tackle two societal issues: how to value diversity, and how to link those diverse elements together. Herein lies the mission we have set ourselves with the Tobira Project.

A Tobira’s term lasts three years. In that time, the Tobira use art to devise spaces for dialogue in which everyone can participate on an equal footing, and come up with activities that bring together different kinds of people with diverse values. The Tobira consist of a variety of people aged eighteen or over: office workers, educators, students, freelancers, retirees, housewives, and so on.

The Tobira are volunteers, but they are more than that. They are key players, working alongside experts like curators and university educators. After they have finished their terms, they remain active across society as art communicators. We hope that this book can be of help to all those who will continue to collaborate with citizens, confronting regional issues from their museums and other cultural institutions, with a view to creating new communities.

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Preface ... 3

Introduction – From Education to Art Communication ... 5

Chapter One – Forging Connections in Museums: The Tobira's Activities ... 10

Case 1: The Tobira as "Girls with Pearl Earrings"? ... 10

A museum for all, created by a hundred people – Tatsuya Ito ... 19

Case 2: "Go with the Tobira Board!" & "Tobi-Badge Project," two Tobi-Labo enhancing the museum experience ... 27

Born of their own accord: The structure of the Tobi-Labo – Tatsuya Ito ... 37

Case 3: "The Scent of Botticelli," a workshop created with the help of a deaf person ... 44

Column: "A place where you can be like this" – Yoshiaki Nishimura ... 53

Tobira Interview: "How to spend three valuable years of your life" – Shunichi Nagai (Tobira 2015–2018) ... 57

Chapter Two – The Museum as a Community-building Hub ... 59

Case 4: "Wonderful Discoveries in Ueno," a collaboration between museums in Ueno Park ... 59

Museum Start iUeno: A learning design project – Sawako Inaniwa ... 70

Case 5: The "Special Monday Course," a day for encountering real art ... 75

Building a system of collaboration between children and adults – Sawako Inaniwa ... 83

Case 6: "Museum Trips" connecting people from different backgrounds ... 88

Column: "Where the Tobira Project is headed" – Katsuhiko Hibino ... 95

Tobira Interview: "Something I might be able to do too" – Sakura Kajiura (Tobira 2017–2020) ... 99

Chapter Three – Quality Communication That Opens Doors in Society ... 101

Case 7: The Tobira after the Project, Part 1 – As a designer, as a curator ... 101

Art communicators beyond the Tobira Project – Tatsuya Ito ... 111

Case 8: The Tobira after the Project, Part 2 – "Installing" activities in society ... 115

Art communicators and society – Sawako Inaniwa ... 124

Column: "The innovations of the Art Communication Programs" – Tsukasa Mori ... 130

Tobira Interview: "Somewhere to get something out of art" – Noriko Kondo (Tobira 2013–2016) 134

Chapter Four – The Tobira Project's Present and Future ... 136

How the Tobira Project Works ... 142

*This book introduces the activities of the collaborative project run by the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum and Tokyo University of the Arts, partly through interviewing those involved. The numbers in brackets after people's names indicate their age at the time of the publication of the Japanese edition (October 2018).

Introduction – From Education to Art Communication

What is the Tobira Project?

There are art museums in many of Japan's cities and towns, and their role is now starting to change significantly. In fact, it is fair to say that these museums are awakening a force that has always lain dormant within them. There are, however, few structures in place that help citizens to meet up and think about the possibilities that these museums, as public spaces, offer – or to play a proactive part in their activities. The Tobira Project began in 2012 as an attempt to make this happen.

The Tobira Project is a collaborative social design project that brings together the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum (a.k.a. "the Tobi") and Tokyo University of the Arts (a.k.a. "Geidai"), both located in Tokyo's Ueno Onshi Park (henceforth "Ueno Park"), and members of the public. Around forty new "art communicators" (nicknamed "Tobira") join the project every year; they devise social activities based in museums, while sharing a learning space with museum curators and experts from the art university.

With each Tobira serving a fixed three-year term, the 120-odd Tobira get to interact in all kinds of ways as they build the society of the future.

The Tobira Project brings people of all ages and walks of life together to think about new ways to connect people with public spaces. This is why we describe it as a "social design project."

Tobira come from many different generations, ranging from eighteen to seventy years old. People in work – a demographic known as *shakaijin* – and between their late twenties and forties make up the biggest group, followed by housewives, and retirees in their sixties. Some 250 people apply each year, around five or six for each place. Throughout the year, the Tobira hold over three hundred meetings, or "Tobi-Labo," on their own initiative, and they ping comments to each other every day via dedicated online channels.

The Tobira, or "art communicators," are at the heart of the Tobira Project – but what does their role consist of? The word "Tobira" is a nickname which refers to "Tobi," a Japanese abbreviation of "Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum," as well as the Japanese word *tobira* or "door," as in "opening new doors." The Tobira are volunteers, but they are more than that. They are key players, working alongside experts like curators and university educators.

We are sometimes asked whether the Tobira Project should be seen as a souped-up museum volunteering scheme. Not at all, we reply. A big difference with this project is that the museum, the university, and members of the public work as a team, approaching social issues on an equal footing, like co-researchers.

Moreover, the project envisions that each and every Tobira will remain an art communicator even after completing their three-year term, and continue to bring people

together through art, wherever they might be. This is another significant difference.

Another common question: “If the Tobira Project is not a volunteering scheme, is it an ‘art project’?” It is certainly a project that unfolds through art; yet it differs from the so-called art projects that began in the 1990s, whereby artists head to the provinces, unearth the region’s cultural resources, and work with the locals to create works and new values.

The greatest difference is that the project does not revolve around artists. Of course, when it comes to the Tobira’s activities, artworks and cultural artifacts are among their most important resources. However, the Tobira are not there to support artists in their work. Rather, their purpose is to launch their own activities proactively by pooling their individual skills and ideas, and harnessing the works and artifacts exhibited in museums.

Another difference is the fact that the Tobira’s activities are permanently based in museums. But this does not mean that they organize participatory projects around exhibitions devoted to artists. The Tobira Project runs parallel to museums’ exhibitions, its activities unfolding throughout the year as an independent project.

All year round, the Tobira hold regular meetings in which, through trial and error, they devise their activities. As a result, the programs they come up with are not included in the calendars released by museums at the start of the year. For the Tobira work out both the number of projects and their dates as they go along.

The evolving role of the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum

The Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, where the Tobira’s activities are based, was created in 1926 as the Tokyo Prefectural Art Museum – Japan’s first public art museum. It was established after Keitaro Sato, a wealthy coal merchant from Kyushu who dreamed of having a Western-style museum in Tokyo, the nation’s capital, donated one million yen (3.2 billion yen in today’s money) to the Tokyo government. The initial building, which was designed by Shinichiro Okada, had a classical museum’s façade, with large steps and colonnades. But the museum was redesigned half a century later, in 1975, by Kunio Mayekawa, a key figure in modernist architecture; the building reopened in 2012 after renovation work, establishing the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum as it is today.

In hindsight, we can broadly divide the museum’s soon-to-be century of history into four periods. The first covers the fifty years from its opening to Mayekawa’s redesign, when it was run as a kind of art center – a venue for exhibitions organized by the government, independent art groups, newspaper companies, etc. By the late sixties, the Tobi was receiving over one million visitors annually, and many of Japan’s leading artists were choosing the museum as a venue for the unveiling of new works.

The second period covers the twenty years from the opening of Mayekawa’s new building. This is when the Tobi really began to take on the functions of a museum. Curators

acquired works for the collection and planned their own exhibitions; a series of participatory workshops – then a cutting-edge experiment – on sculpture and modeling was launched; the first art library to be housed in a public museum was opened.

However, in 1995, a new prefectural museum, the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, was opened in Kiba, Koto Ward. As a result, the Tobi's functions were temporarily reduced: 3000-odd works in its collection were moved to the new museum, and curators ceased to organize exhibitions of their own. This is the third period.

When the advisory committee met in 2007 to discuss the Tobi's future, it was suggested that while the museum underwent a large-scale restoration, the activities that take place inside should also be updated for the twenty-first century. For instance, exhibitions organized by curators would return, and the "Art Communication Programs" would be made a central pillar of the museum's regeneration. This was the trigger for the Tobira Project. The years between the reopening in 2012 – a consequence of this policy – and the present day make up the fourth period.

Launching the Art Communication Programs, the centerpiece of the museum's regeneration

As documents about it make clear, the museum's Art Communication Programs grew out of a 2007 report by the Cultural Institutions Committee titled "New Activities for the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, Their Contents and Scale: Toward a New Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum that Pursues 'The Meaning of Creativity for Humans.'" The report defined the scheme's aims as "advancing art literacy and encouraging communication with artworks," and its contents as "projects, exhibitions, and other activities designed to educate about, promote, and aid the appreciation of art, with an emphasis on communication with artworks."

Converting an advisory committee's report of this sort into a concrete scheme for a museum requires understanding and cooperation among the many people involved. It takes a long time to launch a completely unprecedented scheme like art communication in a public institution which values precedent – all kinds of issues need to be addressed, from the team's structure, budgetary measures, and allocation of staff, to the actual contents of the programs. Yet several people who worked on this project have said that the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, the Tokyo Metropolitan Foundation for History and Culture, and the museum's curators gave it their all, working closely together to lay the groundwork for the scheme.

In May 2011, shortly before the reopening, the Tobi's people approached Katsuhiko Hibino, an artist and professor at Geidai, to discuss the idea of a new art communication scheme; thus began the Tobi's collaboration with Geidai. Hibino suggested setting up a permanent system of workshops at the museum. In return, the Tobi proposed a collaborative project involving members of the public: "A Museum for All, Created by a Hundred People." Barely half a year later, the Tobira Project was born.


Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum

The significance of Geidai's involvement in the Tobira Project

Now, what is the significance of Geidai's decision to collaborate with the Tobi on the Tobira Project?

Tokyo University of the Arts is the only national arts university in Japan. It was established in 1949 under the newly reformed education system, through a merger of two national institutions founded in the Meiji Era, the Tokyo Fine Arts School and the Tokyo Music School. Since it opened, it has produced a large number of distinguished artists who have flourished both in Japan and abroad; in 2017, it celebrated the 130th anniversary of the founding of its parent schools.

Regarding Geidai's training of artists to date, one thing is certain. Namely, these artists' creative visions have the power to reevaluate society's customs, received ideas, and other established values.

Most students aim to become artists, and spend their days working intently in their workshops. However, once they graduate, they find that the real world is not as hospitable an environment as the university workshop; going to Geidai is no guarantee that one can make it as an artist.

At Geidai's entrance ceremony, the president recites a saying that has been passed down through the generations: "Congratulations on your place. Among you there are one or two gems. The rest of you must become grindstones and polish these gems." In other words, that is how tough the world out there is.

Depending on how one looks at it, though, being a grindstone can have its advantages. The creativity cultivated in college is good for other things than just producing physical artworks. In fact, some people go on to use the creativity they have developed to improve society.

One duty of art universities is to work to bring about the kind of society in which those who have devoted themselves to becoming artists can go on to thrive and benefit others. For this to happen, artists, curators, and members of the public must first meet on an equal footing and, through art, form a community in which they can acknowledge each other's values and ways of life.

From the perspective of Geidai, an educational institution, its work on the Tobira Project is a form of personnel training in the broadest sense of the term. But it is not about

acquiring qualifications or teaching some specific skills.

Geidai is, in the first place, a university that produces artists – but artists have no need for qualifications or licenses. Not only that, there is also no clear process for becoming an artist. Instead, over the years, Geidai has always asked its students to consider the very idea of *living creatively*. The Tobira Project is one extension of this mindset.

Of course, the Tobira Project is not about training artists. And yet the training of artists and the fostering of an art community are fundamentally similar, in that they both suggest ways to live creatively. Much as we do from artists, we expect great things from those who live as art communicators.

"Museum Start iUeno," Tobira Project's sister initiative

The Tobi and Geidai are not the only ones working to build communities through art. In 2013, the year after the Tobira Project's launch, Museum Start iUeno (see Chapter Two) was set up as a collaboration between nine cultural institutions in Ueno Park (Tokyo National Museum; National Museum of Nature and Science; National Museum of Western Art; International Library of Children's Literature; Ueno Zoological Gardens; Tokyo Bunka Kaikan; Ueno Royal Museum; Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum; Tokyo University of the Arts).[1]

The project helps children toward their first museum experience, making wide-ranging use of Ueno Park's wealth of cultural facilities, and devising spaces where adults and children can learn together on equal terms. Through a synergetic combination of Museum Start iUeno and its sister initiative Tobira Project, we believe that our talented art communicators can thrive even more in society.


Tokyo University of the Arts.

[1] Organizers: Tokyo Metropolitan Government; Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, Arts Council Tokyo (Tokyo Metropolitan Foundation for History and Culture); Tokyo University of the Arts. Co-organizers: International Library of Children's Literature; National Museum of Nature and Science; National Museum of Western Art; Tokyo Bunka Kaikan; Tokyo National Museum; Ueno Royal Museum; Ueno Zoological Gardens (in alphabetical order).

Chapter One
Forging Connections in Museums: The Tobira's Activities

Case 1: The Tobira as "Girls with Pearl Earrings"?

Text: Mao Yoshida

The Tobira appear before the queue, wearing blue turbans

In the middle of September 2012, a long queue formed on the esplanade of the Tobi (Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum). The people in the queue had come to see the exhibition *Masterpieces from the Royal Picture Gallery Mauritshuis*. With the exhibition about to end, more than sixteen thousand visitors came in a single day.

As they waited their turn under a blazing sun, before them suddenly appeared twenty or thirty men and women wearing blue turbans like the one in Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, one of the highlights of the exhibition. These were Tobira from the Tobira Project, which had only just started that April. As they drew the visitors' attention, they began to perform an original calisthenics routine inspired by Vermeer and his work, while a band struck up a lively performance with recorders, melodicas, castanets. Some children even started dancing along to the sounds. Before long, there appeared a picture frame large enough to fit around someone's entire upper body. The people now had what they needed to become the Girl with a Pearl Earring. They could don a blue turban, enter the frame, and have a souvenir photo taken in which they struck the same pose as the girl. Visitors immediately appeared, keen to give it a go.

On another day, different Tobira, also wearing blue turbans, handed out fans hand-made from old fliers to visitors as they passed by. This brought smiles to the faces of the people queueing on the esplanade.

They are not museum staff, yet nor are they volunteers. They are what we call "art communicators," interacting with visitors to the museum. These activities which the Tobira independently organize are referred to as "Tobi-Labo"; a wide range are launched every year, some tying into exhibitions at the Tobi, others venturing further afield. The Tobira thus come up with activities that transcend the boundaries of how we normally appreciate art – but what kind of people are they?


Line for the exhibition

 Tobira Band performing

Being a Tobira: creating “one” out of “zero”

The Tobira Project, which the Tobi and Geidai (Tokyo University of the Arts) teamed up to launch as a way to bring diverse people together through art and build an art community, counts a wide variety of people of different ages and backgrounds among its members: students, office workers, educators, designers, retirees, housewives, freelancers, and so on. As a result, the members also have all kinds of different interests, and some think in unconventional ways.

Mr. Shinji Onodera (59), who ordinarily works as a freelance creator of puzzles and riddles, was part of the first cohort of Tobira. During his term, he set up many Tobi-Labo, where projects like those mentioned above are elaborated, and he proved to be an effective and versatile man of ideas. His magnetic personality – easygoing yet bursting with unique ideas – made a real impact on the Tobira Project.

Ms. Michiko Kondo (36), a former project research assistant at Geidai, helped to run the Tobira Project from its launch in 2012 until 2015. As she recalls: “When the project launched, we administrative staff members were still very much finding our way. For the first month or two, we weren’t sure how to encourage the Tobira to set up their own Tobi-Labo; we held get-togethers and invited people to participate, and still nothing much happened. And then, like a shooting star, Mr. Onodera appeared.”

When Mr. Onodera heard the introductory talk about the Tobira Project, he says he was struck by a particular phrase: “We don’t want you to just support [the visitors to the museum] – we want you to become key players.”

As he puts it, “I was drawn to this idea that it wouldn’t be like volunteering, even if that meant we’d have a lot more on our plates. It seemed like we’d get to do interesting things. So I wrote a message to the Tobira mailing list, which included the administrative staff, saying: ‘Are you reading this, everybody? If so, please reply with “Yes” as the subject line.’”

Yes, Yes, Yes, Yes: as forty or fifty people proceeded to reply to the mailing list, everyone on the list found their phone and computer inboxes filled up with “Yeses.” Nobody was yet ready to launch activities of their own accord, but this showed that many people had high hopes for what the Tobira Project could achieve.

“There was the odd ‘Yo’ or ‘Yup’ among the ‘Yeses’ too,” recalls Mr. Onodera. “I thought to myself, if this many people were happy to indulge me in a bit of fun like this, we

could probably do some interesting things together."


Mr. Shinji Onodera as Vermeer

Not right for an art museum?

Just at this time, long queues were being predicted for the Mauritshuis exhibition, which was to open at the Tobi in June. On the online bulletin board for Tobira, Mr. Onodera posted, "To entertain the people in the queue, what if we did one of those cutout boards people put their faces through in tourist sites and theme parks, but with *Girl with a Pearl Earring*?" He suggested that the program could be named "You too can be a Girl with a Pearl Earring," with "Blue Turban," a reference to the painting's alternative title *Girl with a Blue Turban*, as a nickname.

The Tobira Project is constructed around the Principal and Practical Sessions, which are led by experts from various fields. Attending these sessions had heightened the Tobira's enthusiasm to put into practice the experiences and perspectives they were acquiring. Mr. Onodera's input prompted around ten others to start eagerly contributing their own ideas.

"Even among the Tobira, there are actually few people who can come up with a whole new idea – 'creating one out of zero,' as we put it," says Ms. Kondo. "But Mr. Onodera was one such person."

Tobira apply to the Tobira Project because they want to be proactive. They are not the sort to wait around for instructions, so once an idea was born – once zero had turned into one – it did not take long for two and three to follow.

Of course, that does not mean they all agreed wholeheartedly with the Blue Turban idea. For a start, Ms. Kondo herself – a Tobira Project manager who had majored in fine arts at Geidai – was skeptical.

"I thought it might be a little embarrassing to put up a touristy cutout board at an art museum… But there was so much passion in that room full of Tobira, and as a coordinator I obviously wanted to make the most of that passion. I remember feeling conflicted to begin with."


Meeting in the Art Study Room

Putting people's special skills to use for the exhibition

Ordinarily, the Tobira's duties take up a minimum of two days per month – but if they had kept that pace in the month before the start of the Mauritshuis exhibition, things would not have been ready in time. In addition to the compulsory sessions, they met three or four days per week and held successive meetings in the Art Study Room (ASR) on the Tobi's second floor, the details of which were immediately uploaded to the "Today's Whiteboard" page on the Tobira Project's website.

One Tobira, Ms. Kaoru Tokita (50), found it difficult to make free time while raising her children, and was unable to attend the meetings – but she was checking the online whiteboard.

"Through the mailing list, I saw that this man, Mr. Onodera, was taking the initiative to make things happen," she says. "At the time, I was trying to work out what I'd be able to do as a Tobira, and this motivated me to try and do something concrete too."

Ms. Tokita went around her local textile stores and Nippori's Fabric Town, just a bike ride away, looking for cloth that would be right for the turban in *Girl with a Pearl Earring*. She has always liked making things, sometimes selling her own handmade goods at kindergarten bazaars. For her, it is important to be able to dedicate quality time to producing things, without any distractions. And on this occasion, she proposed that she could make the Blue Turban attire herself.

"Even if I explained my idea, I assumed I'd be asked to show something, so I started by making a sample," says Ms. Tokita. "To begin with, I focused on just giving shape to my idea. You get this feeling of becoming absorbed in what you enjoy. As the exhibition approached, I got this strange thrill."

Ms. Tokita brought the turban she had made to a meeting. It went down very well with the other Tobira, who tried it on in turn. Some even started taking photos.

"In that moment, I felt as though we'd become friends on the spot, even though we'd only just met."

At this stage, the plan was to have a cutout board with the painting on it; but now that the turban had actually materialized, it was suggested that people could take photos while wearing it. In the end, it was put to a vote: board or turban? When it came to it, Mr. Onodera chose neither.

"I preferred the turban, but we'd have to make dozens. Could we really ask so much of Ms. Tokita? Also, this was the first time I'd ever spoken to her, and I didn't know whether she's someone who keeps her word. [laughs] Putting practicalities first, the picture on a cutout board was something I could even do myself – at worst, a person could manage it on their own. I couldn't make up my mind."

Seeing Mr. Onodera hesitate, Ms. Tokita understood that he was trying to get a

realistic idea of the workload that the turbans would require of her. This made her feel at once happy and motivated: “With people like this on our team, we can do it. I’ll give it my all.” As a result, the Tobira decided to drop the cutout board and make plenty of turbans, even if it meant more work.

While Ms. Tokita got down to the real work of making the attire, other Tobira, particularly those with handicraft skills, built a large frame that could fit someone from the waist up. Using the frame around Vermeer’s original painting for reference, they layered boards and added paint, and used a glue gun to affix complex ornaments.

Moreover, as feet would still be seen beneath the frame in photos, they created the wall on which to mount the frame, using two tatami-sized sheets of styrene board. They coated the wall in gray spray paint, but the board absorbed the paint, causing the coating to become mottled. Yet, looking closely, the gray coloring gradually came to resemble marble. As Mr. Onodera puts it, “By chance, it actually came out better that way.” In the end, they overcame the problem by cleverly exploiting the mottling and turning it into a marble-style wall.


Posing in the turbans


Working on the frame

<u>When many Tobira activities organically merge</u>

As the days on which people would work were shared on the online bulletin board, Tobira who had not attended the meetings also came in droves to help out. Some even worked outdoors amid swarms of mosquitos, until their legs were covered with a dozen black insects and they looked ready to collapse. Aside from Blue Turban, the task of entertaining people in the queue also inspired a range of other Tobi-Labo.

• Flyer Fan

Eco-friendly fans were made out of recycled fliers for past exhibitions. Hand-folding them one

by one, Tobira prepared one thousand in total, and handed them out to visitors in the queue to help them cool down.

• Picture Story Show

Kamishibai, which literally means “paper theater,” is a Japanese art form in which a performer displays a series of illustrated boards while narrating the story they tell. Tobira staged a *kamishibai* around a new story called *Tobiko’s Time Travels* (“Tobiko” being a girl’s name). The running time was around ten minutes, and the performances were held in a corner of the Art Lounge on the first floor. As *Kamishibai* is a traditional medium, this event went down particularly well with older visitors.

• Vermeer Calisthenics, Volume 1

Tobira invented a calisthenics routine as a way to draw people to the Art Lounge for the Picture Story Show. The group performed the routine to music; the choreography was simple enough for children to join in. As it got a good response from visitors, it was also used to introduce Blue Turban.

• Tobira Band

Tobira who can play musical instruments got together to form a band. On the day, they got the crowd going with their renditions of “Metropolitan Museum,” which people know from the NHK program *Minna no Uta*, and a variant of “Country Roads” with newly written lyrics.

As was described at the beginning of the chapter, on September 16 – the grand finale – almost all the Tobi-Labo convened on the esplanade and greeted the visitors in style.

In this way, the Tobira Project serves as a marvelous space in which adults who are normally busy with their day jobs can join in and focus all their attention on the activities. What does becoming a “key player” at the museum, rather than just a “supporter,” involve? Although the Tobira Project was still finding its way at the time, this series of activities started to flesh out what it means to be one of its art communicators.


Picture Story Show

<u>The Tobira, who are not art experts, show others how to enjoy a museum</u>

Blue Turban was held a total of four times during the Mauritshuis exhibition. More visitors

wanted to take part than expected, and each time there was a queue. Some asked whether the experience was free. One of the things they learned is that it is actually quite hard to look over one's shoulder as the girl does in the painting. Assuming the role of a character in a painting, as it turned out, also helped to deepen one's appreciation of that work.

After the exhibition had ended, the Tobira received some news that made them happy. The Kobe City Museum, the exhibition's next stop, wanted to borrow the complete Blue Turban kit. The turbans and frame made by the Tobira had the honor of being transported with the original Vermeers in a vehicle reserved for artworks. So that the program could be repeated in Kobe, instructions on how to put on the turbans were prepared, alongside a choreography guide for the Vermeer Calisthenics, and a DVD containing a video message in which the Tobira sent their warmest wishes. These were all sent with the kit.

"I got to see how I could contribute to the Tobira Project," says Ms. Tokita. "I also discovered a new way to experience art in a museum: give a material form to the emotions that a work creates in you, share it with others, then appreciate the original again. I had a wonderful time."

On the day, Mr. Onodera donned a mustache and dressed as Vermeer. "I was nervous," he recalls. "Would visitors be into it? Would there be complaints? If there are, how should I, as a Tobira, assume responsibility? But I thought that some people were bound to like it, and so we should aim it at them. Having begun, everyone saw it through to the end. I had the sense that we were all in it together, the staff included."


Blue Turban in action


Meeting notes on the whiteboard

Through Blue Turban, the Tobi-Labo start to take shape

Just as the Blue Turban plan pivoted midway from the cutout board to the turbans, every other Tobi-Labo plan was refined and modified in accordance with members' opinions and material requirements. For example, in their first performance the Tobira Band members stood still, but from the second time onward they started marching in unplanned ways. Rather than stick to a plan, Tobira would sometimes come up with ideas on the spot, and things would go off in a

completely new direction. Many Tobira say that they “got a thrill” precisely from this unpredictability.

At the time, there was a core group of around ten Tobira who were playing an active part in the Blue Turban meetings. As the Tobi-Labo are not compulsory, if individuals lose their motivation, nothing gets done. While proceeding with his project, Mr. Onodera always bore in mind the possibility that the Tobira might not show up, so he took steps to prevent this. In order to make other Tobira keen to join Blue Turban, he uploaded photos of the meetings on the Tobira Project online bulletin board, and even went as far as to put things they had made in places where other Tobira would see them.

Through Blue Turban, the Tobi-Labo’s administrative rules – how to use budgets, how to propose plans – began to crystallize. These practices, such as what to do when purchasing materials or how to write a proposal, are also essential for sharing information with the Tobi and Geidai. In this sense too, the Blue Turban Tobi-Labo can be seen as a crucial step in the first days of the Tobira Project scheme.

Different ways to interpret the role of art communicator

Despite the improvements to the original cutout board idea, Ms. Kondo from Geidai had still been worried that Blue Turban might not be suitable for a space like an art museum. When she saw that visitors had loved it, she was amazed.

“On the day, I was so worried that no-one would try out the frame that I even considered arranging stooges to encourage visitors to take part. But loads of visitors were queueing before the frame! Blue Turban taught me that there are definitely approaches to art, ways of enjoying it, that had been unknown to me.”

Having spoken repeatedly with Tobira of all ages and backgrounds, Ms. Kondo notes the dual nature of being an art communicator.

“Among the Tobira, I think there are those who lay emphasis on the art, and those who lay it on the communication. Some Tobira, who truly love art and hold regular study sessions and such, don’t see how trying to become the girl in the painting would help convey the brilliance of Vermeer to the visitors. Those Tobira did not participate in Blue Turban.”

Curators from the Tobi and teaching staff from Geidai, the Tobira Project’s administrative staff, run the activities alongside the Tobira. As each field comes with its own approaches to art, there are sometimes differences of opinion between the Tobira, between the Tobira and the staff, or even among the staff members regarding what the project should be.

Incidentally, many of the Tobi-Labo that followed Blue Turban were held in the style of study sessions; their goal was not to come up with ideas to spice up events but to stress the importance of the process, of dialogue between Tobira. These sessions included several

meetings, which threw up many ideas that did not materialize in the way that Blue Turban did.

The term “art communicator” covers all kinds of things, as the diversity of Tobi-Labo demonstrates. It is precisely because people with different standpoints participate that original ideas are generated, and a variety of perspectives is also permitted when it comes to putting those ideas into practice or deciding on values. There is no correct way to be a Tobira or run a Tobi-Labo.

At any rate, there is no doubt that Blue Turban, as conceived by Mr. Onodera and successfully implemented by the team, paved the way for one approach to connecting museums with the talented new art communicators. It has been seven years since the Tobira Project was launched. Tobira and staff still recount the events of that day, which have become the stuff of legend among the team.

Ms. Kondo in meeting with the Tobira

A museum for all, created by a hundred people
Tatsuya Ito

The museum as “a space for a slow revolution of the people”

In the words of the art critic Akira Tatehata, a museum is “something that cultivates a civic consciousness, serving as *a space for a slow revolution of the people*.”[2] It is a description that I like.

I feel that this idea also shares something with the concept of “A Museum for All, Created by a Hundred People” that was proposed back when the Tobira Project was still in development.

A hundred or so people of different ages and occupations meet up time and again in a museum, talk and talk about this and that, think up various programs, put them into practice, hold study sessions; experts mingle with ordinary people, and together they think about the future. And if their energy can gradually improve society, wonderful. But how can we go about creating a space like this?

I would like to discuss here the creative experimentation, the trial and error, behind our attempts to design such a space, and the structure of the Tobira Project that resulted.

Let me begin with the collaboration between the Tobi and Geidai, which is a pretty serious commitment. How serious? Enough for there to be a room in the Tobi where Geidai staff members are permanently stationed.

The room in which the Geidai staff works from day to day is known as the Project Room. The Tobi staff describes it as “the most pleasant room in the museum”; it is a spacious office, with good views of Ueno Park’s greenery.

The Geidai and Tobi staff involved in the running of the Tobira Project and Museum Start iUeno (see Chapter Two) meet daily in the Project Room, where they do their work and have discussions. In addition to their meetings, they have lunch together every day.

The Tobi and Geidai may be neighbors, but each organization has its own culture, and naturally their ways of deciding and thinking about things also differ. Approaching these differences as a positive, and finding a way to turn them into useful energy, are what make a collaborative scheme both tricky and interesting. It is fair to say that a collaboration between two different organizations stands or falls on the quality of their communication.

Therefore, it is absolutely crucial for the members of the different organizations to have a space like the Project Room, where they can work together.

The staff members are not the only ones who meet in the Project Room; the Tobira

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[2] *Я, A journal on contemporary art and culture* | *21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa*, issue 04/2007. Editorial supervision by Curatorial Section, 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa (2007).

join too. It is an open space, known among the Tobira as “the room you’re a bit nervous to enter in your first year, where you begin meetings in your second, and where you start having tea in your third.”

 Project Room

Seeking and selecting Tobira

The staff who drives the Tobira Project and Museum Start iUeno are required to have certain specialist skills. Of course, the curators must be experienced in planning exhibitions, the university educators in conducting research – but that is not all. What makes a skilled staff member is knowing how to put together and carry out a cultural scheme. They are expected to be good at maximizing all their resources – including artworks, personnel, venues, funds, and time – when putting together and carrying out their scheme.

The staff on the Tobira Project and Museum Start iUeno has a special duty to nurture the Tobira’s activities, creating a setup that enables their active participation, while also assisting them in delivering the value of their programs’ achievements to society.

The Tobira perform their activities together with the Tobi and Geidai; they are valuable partners. Here I will describe our system for recruiting them.

First of all, the Tobira (art communicators) receive no wages or travel expenses. Instead, they get free access to the museum’s exhibitions during opening hours, and they can also take part in a range of workshops and programs. Moreover, they can get involved with original activities planned by the Tobira themselves, collaborating with fellow Tobira, curators, and university educators.

More than two hundred people apply yearly to become a Tobira, of whom around 70% are under forty years old. You may think, “It’s Tokyo – lots of young people go to museums,” but even in Tokyo it is rare for under-forties to go to museums to engage in voluntary work.

So why has the Tobira Project managed to resonate with these people? One significant reason is that we do not once use the word “volunteer” in the Tobira recruitment pamphlet.

Let me state again that the Tobira Project has a completely different purpose from “museum volunteering.” Basically, when calling for applications, the crucial question is whether this is properly conveyed.

Using the word “volunteer” would certainly be an easy way to communicate to

potential applicants that the scheme is unpaid, and to give them an idea of the kind of activities involved. The word is simple to understand, but we must resist using it. For it also entails assumptions about the scheme that will occasionally interfere with what we are really trying to communicate.

Thus, for the Tobira Project, we only use the term “art communicator.” Art communicators are key players on a par with the curators and university educators, who create bonds between people, and between people and art; in truth, though, this is confusing. That said, if we devote all our efforts and ingenuity to the things we want to say, then at the very least the message that we have something to say will get through. I believe that this is more important than anything when looking to recruit Tobira.

A Tobira’s term lasts three years, and applications are open to anyone aged eighteen or over, excluding high school students.

The first round of the selection is a paper screening process; the second round consists of a group interview. For the first round, applicants must submit a statement describing their motives for applying to be an art communicator, and their significant relevant experience. It does not matter if they have no experience working or volunteering in museums. They have to keep their answers to one side of A4, and submit it alongside an application form.

While their motives for becoming a Tobira must of course be clear, another criterion for selection is whether the applicants understand why they need this opportunity, i.e. the Tobira Project.

There are many places in the world where you can do things for others. It is less common to find a place which you feel is necessary for your own self. I think nothing is more important than needing to be there yourself. This is only one criterion, but we bear it in mind when making our assessments in the first round. Once we have whittled down the list of candidates to around a hundred – half the original number – we select the final forty through the second-round group interviews.

All this notwithstanding, the truth is that we would love for all applicants to become Tobira. Yet if we welcome forty people per year, that comes to 120 in total across the three cohorts. In terms of the project’s setup and the size of the room (the Art Study Room), 120 people is about right.

I am sometimes asked on what basis the Tobira are chosen. I have thought hard about this, and my reply is that it comes down to luck, to fate. It may seem to some that I am dodging the question, but I certainly do not mean to be evasive.

The reason is that when we select Tobira, we not only consider the aptitude of each individual applicant, but also strive to create a balanced team. In practice, we take care to ensure that the 120-odd Tobira represent a wide variety of backgrounds and values, and as even a distribution of ages as possible, ranging from late teens to septuagenarians. The ideal environment is one that comprises people from diverse positions and professions:

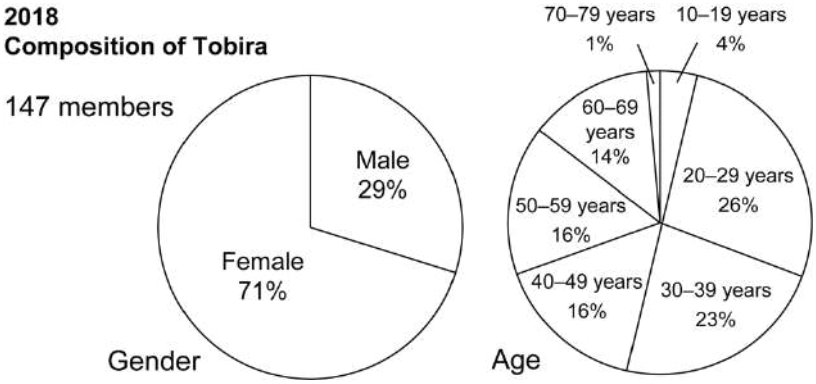
housewives, office workers, educators, designers, artists, NPO employees, civil servants, retirees, people of other nationalities, students. Educational qualifications and a specialized knowledge of art are not required – if anything, we consciously try to be unbiased, acknowledging that people can have all kinds of motivations for becoming a Tobira.

Every year, we welcome new Tobira to the project, and say goodbye to old Tobira as they complete their three-year term and go out into society. As *tobira* can mean “doorway” in Japanese, we refer to finishing one’s term as “the opening.”

The reason we limit terms to three years is that this keeps the organization fresh and in a state of constant renewal, while allowing us to continually reaffirm the concept behind the Tobira Project.

Moreover, as this predetermined time limit – the opening – is part of the project’s design, we are always aware that we must let things go, and this makes us more open to accepting new things. This may seem like a simple matter, but it is not.

The fact is that, while we have to bid farewell to every Tobira after three years, there are some who we wish could stay a little longer. They are missed – but spring brings new faces.



2017 flyer recruiting new Tobira

<u>What do the Tobira learn?</u>

Most people who want to be Tobira have never worked or volunteered in an art museum. This means that they are not all suddenly ready to serve as art communicators once they are accepted.

Moreover, when people of different occupations and ages come together, they bring all kinds of values with them, and it is too much to expect teamwork from the beginning. Every year, the Tobira's activities start out from this point. But the Tobira Project has ways to get these people to communicate and start developing their activities.

One of these systems is the two-tiered course known as the Principal and Practical Sessions. I say "course," but it is not centered on classroom teaching – both tiers are structured as workshops, and participants often engage in discussions and group work.

First come the Principal Sessions, in which the participants develop a shared understanding of the project's goals and learn the basics of communicating as a Tobira. Six compulsory four-hour sessions are held yearly, every two weeks from April to late June.

Once they have completed the Principal Sessions, the Tobira move on to the Practical Sessions, which consist of three elective courses based around more practical scenarios that arise during the activities. These courses are: "Facilitating the appreciation of artworks through dialogue" (henceforth Art Appreciation Course); "How to make a museum accessible to all, including people with disabilities" (Accessibility Course); and "Convey the appeal of a museum as a work of architecture" (Architecture Course). Each course is made up of around eight three-hour sessions held throughout the year. Every year, the Tobira choose at least one, through which they are able to deepen their learning as art communicators.

"Down the Road Seminars" are also held, with a view to getting the Tobira to organize activities independently in their local communities after concluding their three-year term. The purpose of these seminars is to cultivate the knowledge and experience that individuals require to create good relationships, on an independent and continuous basis, between people and other people, art, and museums. These seminars host study groups featuring guests from various fields, including artists; they also venture beyond the precincts of the Tobi and Geidai to conduct the workshops that they have planned in the real world.

At the Principal Session

<u>The original guided tours devised by Tobira</u>

The sessions attended by the Tobira do not stop at classroom teaching, but pair this with practical courses. For instance, the Architecture Course features architecture tours given by Tobira. On the third Saturday of every odd-numbered month (six times per year), around thirty visitors convene, split up into several groups, and go for a 45-minute walk around the museum's highlights. The Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum was designed by Kunio Mayekawa,

a key figure in modernist architecture, and the aim of these walks is for the visitors to appreciate Mayekawa's work with the Tobira.

"Apparently Kunio Mayekawa was a gourmet, which is why he put the restaurant in the middle of the Tobi." "60% of the building is actually underground." Visitors always come away with positive things to say about the Tobira's original tours.

Through the Architecture Course, Tobira can learn about the Tobi's history and architectural characteristics. By turning what they have learned into an original guided tour, they can demonstrate their skills as Tobira.

According to Ms. Yumi Kono (39), a curator of the Art Communication Programs who is in charge of the Architecture Course, "What's special about the Tobira is that they don't just give scripted, explanatory tours. We want them all to feel affection for the Tobi and structure their tour around the things they find interesting, or feel like telling others." This stance of Ms. Kono's also derives from how the tours and the Architecture Course came about.

The architecture tours predate the Tobira Project, originating in the period just before the Tobi was due to close for renovation.

When it was decided that the renovation would preserve Kunio Mayekawa's design concept, Ms. Kono, who had studied the history of architecture at postgraduate level, wondered whether they might be able to host some kind of tie-in architecture program. Then she hit upon an idea: a program themed around architecture called "The Tobi Takes a Break: An Architecture Course." It would consist of two strands: tours of the museum, and lectures by architecture historians and staff from Mayekawa Associates, Architects and Engineers, who knew the Tobi's building as it was when it was completed in 1975.

As the museum had never run an architecture-themed program before, some of the staff were worried about attendance; but it was deemed that the program would definitely attract some people who love the Tobi, making for an intimate, welcoming environment, and so Ms. Kono's idea became reality.

The program was scheduled to run over two days just before the museum's closure for renovation (April 3–4, 2010).

Ms. Kono and her team opened the event up to participants and was astonished at what happened: they received more than seven hundred application slips. The excitement spread to the museum's staff – nobody had imagined such a response. The plan changed radically: originally, the team was to show no more than sixty-five people around the museum across the two days, but now they prepared to receive seven hundred. It turned into a major program, with around ten staff members – including the museum's director – giving tours on the days; the unexpected result was that ten staff members with no expertise in architecture ended up giving ten different tours, each informed by their individual perspectives and thoughts.

One anecdote from the event concerns the museum's director, whose tour seemed to be taking a while. While the staff fretted, he was in his office, talking with the participants

whom he had invited in.

The Tobi Takes a Break came about through collaboration among the staff at the time, and the program proved unforgettable not just for the participants but for them, too. It ushered in the Tobi's two-year closure for renovation without a hitch. These events laid the groundwork for the decision to turn architecture tours into a permanent program after the museum's reopening.

Today, in addition to six regular architecture tours, each year sees around ten Tobikan Yakan Kaikan Tours ("Tobi Night Tours"); the Tobira had the idea of holding these during late openings on Fridays, when the museum is lit up with nighttime illuminations. And the range of activities continues to grow: in addition to these tours, the Tobira have thus far created maps of the museum's highlights, planned architecture tours that children can also enjoy, and more.

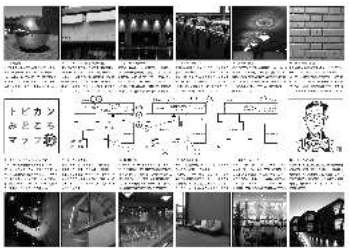
"It made me realize that the way in which a program develops is hugely influenced by the way it was conceived," says Ms. Iku Otani (27), a project research assistant at Geidai and coordinator of the Tobira Project. "I think the ideas the museum staff was having when they organized The Tobi Takes a Break have been taken up by the Tobira with the architecture tours, or the Architecture Course."

Ms. Otani has worked with Ms. Kono to develop the Architecture Course and architecture tours. "The architectural spaces we call museums are designed as places for people to gather in," she says, "and I get the sense that they contain a kind of message that connects different people. I believe that being a Tobira is also about listening to the voice of the place, and making the most of what it says. If, through the course, I can help these Tobira to grow, then I'm happy."

The contents of the Architecture Course change year on year in line with the Tobira's activities. They may go to look at architecture outside the Tobi or join tours in other facilities. Sometimes, they invite architects as guest lecturers.

The team devises these activities one by one, ensuring that the practical side of the programs and the educational side of the course always feed into one another, and in the process, the Tobira Project's identity develops – that is my impression.


Architecture Tour given by Tobira


The Tobira-created "Map of Tobikan's Highlights"

(https://www.tobikan.jp/media/pdf/2019/ac_tobikanmap_en.pdf)

Smartphone version, available in 15 languages

Case 2: “Go with the Tobira Board!” & “Tobi-Badge Project,” two Tobi-Labo enhancing the museum experience

Text: Mao Yoshida

A Tobi-Labo for kids: “Go with the Tobira Board!”

The Tobi-Labo are opportunities for the Tobira to experiment. Some of the programs that have arisen from these activities have become regular events, enduring from the Tobira Project’s first year. “Go with the Tobira Board!” and “Tobi-Badge Project” are two such programs, held in tandem with the Special Exhibitions at the Tobi. Both combine art appreciation with creative activities, and both involve workshops that occur right next to the exhibition spaces. As this proximity could potentially lead to complaints during these crowded exhibitions, they are challenging initiatives for a museum to undertake.

Go with the Tobira Board! is a program for art appreciation and creation. Children of up to middle school age use magnetic drawing boards (or “Tobira Boards”) to sketch the works of art on display. Their drawings are then printed on postcards, which the children may color in and take home.

The program flow runs as follows: children are greeted at the exhibition entrance by Tobira, and those who wish to participate are given a Tobira Board, which they wear around their necks in the exhibition space as they view and sketch the artworks to their hearts’ content. When they are finished, they bring their Tobira Boards to a printing booth located at the exhibition’s exit, where Tobira are present to scan the drawings. The scans are then printed out on the spot on postcards, which feature a picture frame design.

Once the postcards have been printed, the children use colored pencils to color them according to their recollection of the artwork. They are then able to take the completed drawing home.

Lending Tobira Boards to children has been a constant feature of the Special Exhibitions since the reopening of the Tobi in 2012. The idea is that the process of drawing will allow the children to learn how to look at an artwork carefully and deliberately, deepening their experience of the art. Originally, however, no postcards were printed: the children simply returned the Tobira Board at the exit, and were unable to keep the drawings on which they had worked so hard. Go with the Tobira Board! was conceived as a Tobi-Labo that would rectify this issue by having the drawings printed and colored in. The project members consisted of three college students. One of them, Ms. Naho Suzuki (26), who was then studying fine arts at Geidai, recalls:

“I remember noticing that kids always looked bored at art museums. I tried to think why and came to the conclusion that art museums don’t really provide a welcoming

atmosphere for children. They have to be quiet, and the descriptions accompanying the artworks are often inaccessible to the children. I kept thinking there had to be a way to make the experience more enjoyable for them. That was when it occurred to me that we could make better use of the Tobira Boards – it was such a shame that the children's masterpieces were just erased when it was time for them to leave. I wanted to come up with a way for them to keep their drawings, so they would have something concrete to remind them of their experiences at the exhibition. And this led me to set up Go with the Tobira Board!"


A child with a Tobira Board at the El Greco exhibition


Handing out Tobira Boards at the entrance

Children's drawings as conversation starters

The Tobira strike up conversations with the children while they color their postcards. Ms. Suzuki explains:

"I ask the kids why they picked that particular artwork and what they like about it, then they tell me. This exchange also allows parents to understand their children's thought processes. After all, the Tobira are art communicators: it wouldn't be a Tobira Project program if it didn't involve communication."

The children roam the exhibition space with their boards, sketching the artworks at their own pace. Some spend half an hour or longer drawing a single artwork; some sketch one artwork, erase it, and sketch another; some retrace their steps to reinspect an artwork they have already seen. If the children are to be able to attend to their drawings in peace, the adults around them need to be understanding. For this reason, a sign is set up in the area where the Tobira Boards are handed out, asking adults for their cooperation in making room for the children to fully experience the art.

Thus far, the museum has received next to no complaints. Instead, adults can be seen peeking at the children's drawing boards – admiring them, taking an interest in their activities.


Ms. Naho Suzuki

Crafting a simple yet effective manual

No special skills are required to run Go with the Tobira Board! or help out with its preparations, making it an accessible program for Tobira to join. But it took work to turn the program into what it is today, and to sustain it for so long under an ever-changing cast of participants.

According to Ms. Suzuki, “New people joined in the program’s second year, and it felt like we might be getting into a rut. I thought we could take the whole thing further. We came up with all kinds of ideas – adding in special souvenirs, making the drawings into stickers, and so on – but the more we thought about it, the less we felt we actually needed any of that. The Tobira set the stage for the event, but it’s the children who take over from there, enjoying themselves and letting their imaginations run free. Plus, a more complex program would make it difficult for new Tobira to participate. We suppressed our urge to try something new and decided to continue as we had been doing.”

As time went on, Ms. Suzuki began to consider how to make sure that Go with the Tobira Board! did not end when the original members left. With a view to passing down the knowhow, she went about refining and streamlining the program’s operation. For example, the team began to allocate both men and women, whenever possible, in the area where the boards are handed out, so that the shier children would be able to approach more easily. Similarly, when the boards are returned, the Tobira lock the pen in place to prevent accidental erasure of the delicate drawing. Taking all of these details into consideration, Ms. Suzuki created an operation manual for the program, which could be passed on to the next generation of Tobira.


Tobira Board being returned to a Tobira

The Tobira Board’s popularity and the fun of talking with children

Ms. Etsuko Azuma (56), a member of the fifth cohort of Tobira recruits, is a mother of four

children. Her love of children led her to join the Go with the Tobira Board! program, where she presides over the coloring corner, interacting with the kids.

"The children get all restless in front of the printer," says Ms. Azuma, "asking over and over, 'Is it done yet?' Then, when I look at the printed postcard and correctly guess which artwork it's a sketch of, they get very excited, saying, 'Bingo!'"

She makes sure to go to the exhibitions ahead of time and spend time with the art herself, with a view to asking the children lots of questions about their pictures. She sometimes even looks at pieces from below, imitating a child's perspective.

"There are a lot of Tobira who are good at getting children out of their shells," says Ms. Azuma. She found the Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) – approaches to deepening art appreciation through thoughtful discussion, taught in the Art Appreciation Course – to be helpful here. VTS does not focus on theoretical knowledge, instead asking its practitioners to draw out conversation by facilitating exchanges on an even playing field.

"Children have their own ways of communicating. I always make sure to ask how each piece of art looked to them, how it made them feel. This allows the children to discover unexpected ideas of their own."


Ms. Etsuko Azuma

Communicating that there is no right way to draw

As she talks with the children, Ms. Azuma also stays conscious of their parents.

"Children's drawings might seem quite strange to grown-ups, but they can teach us another way of seeing the world. Some of the mothers will look over their child's shoulder as they color and try to correct them, saying things like, 'Shouldn't this bit be red?' But I go ahead and butt in with something like 'Oh look, you're just like Picasso!' That will often get the mothers to relax a little and let the kids draw however they like. Once you give them confidence, children begin to enjoy drawing more."

Parents who try to get their children to "draw it right" are not uncommon. Ms. Azuma has had similar experiences while raising her own children, so she understands the mothers' feelings.

"Most adults wouldn't praise a child if they colored the sun blue, for example. But the key is to first accept their creative choice and give them positive affirmation. I think that's the Tobira's real role."

When Ms. Azuma's son was in kindergarten, he would sometimes finish his drawings

by scratching them all out in black. Asked why, he would reply, “Because it’s nighttime now in that world.” This had been a source of concern for Ms. Azuma, as some people even suggested that it was a sign of a disturbed mind.

“But he had a teacher who would compliment him and really boost his confidence. It was because of that teacher that he was able to maintain his creativity – not only in drawing, but also in his way of thinking. Later, his interests expanded to include different forms of expression, and now he’s a student at Geidai.”


Coloring the postcards

Frames that fit the exhibition

The Tobira meet about five times in the run-up to each Go with the Tobira Board! installment, held to coincide with the Special Exhibitions. Since the actual events are always run in the same way, their conversations mainly focus on the postcard’s frame design. The participants all contribute ideas for a design based on the upcoming exhibition. For example, the frame for *Van Gogh & Japan* was in Van Gogh’s beloved color of yellow and decorated with sunflowers; *Impressionist Masterpieces from Marmottan Monet Museum* featured a frame with a waterlily motif. There are children who love the frame variations and collect the postcards, so this is an important decision.

The Tobira make sure not to get too wrapped up in the frame, however. If the frame itself is too imposing, it will interfere with the children’s drawings. The ideal frame is one that captures the character of the exhibition and sparks further conversation, all the while remaining a supporting role.

Regardless of how much the Tobira prepare, there is always a chance that the Tobi-Labo may be cancelled. With *The 300th Anniversary of his Birth: Jakuchu*, for example, there were so many visitors that it would have been dangerous for the children to walk around with their boards.

“It’s a shame to have to cancel,” says Ms. Azuma, “but the key goal of Go with the Tobira Board! is to enhance the children’s experience of the artwork. If there isn’t a safe environment for that, we don’t hesitate to cancel the event.”

As we have seen, Go with the Tobira Board! stresses the importance of allowing the children to encounter art in a relaxed environment, and to communicate with the Tobira. The program endures to this day, and looks set to continue evolving.

 Postcards of the drawings in their various frames

Original badges for the museumgoers: “Tobi-Badge Project”

There is another Tobi-Labo where participating visitors can take home objects of their own making: the “Tobi-Badge Project.” Like the Go with the Tobira Board! program, it is a program that has been handed down through successive cohorts of Tobira.

Its first installment was held in connection with *Turner from the Tate: The Making of a Master* (October to December 2013) under the title “Take the Turner exhibition home as a badge.”

Near the exhibition’s exit, a booth was set up with a choice of twenty or so different cards, which would become the badges’ backgrounds. These images were prepared by the Tobira in advance, taking inspiration from J.M.W. Turner’s paintings.

The Tobira facilitator explained the workshop’s steps: “Please think back on the exhibition you just saw – what made an impression on you, what colors or forms had an effect on you, and so on. Then choose one of the cards and decide which part of it you’d like to cut out to use for your badge: different bits of the image will create completely different impressions, even if they are the same color. We also have rubber stamps that you can use.”

Watercolor pencils, pens, and rubber stamps carved with motifs from the exhibition stood at ready on the worktables. Participating museumgoers expressed their impressions of the exhibition, each in their own way. Some could not decide which card or stamp to pick; some added more color to their chosen background, reimagining it as their own; some drew pictures instead of using the stamps.

Once the design was complete, the Tobira cut out the circle and used a machine to make it into a badge. There was excitement among the participants when they received their very own badges. Some immediately pinned them onto their clothes or bags, while others compared badges with each other, asking, “Do you think this is Turner-y?”

Ms. Kumiko Shinohara (39), one of the second cohort of Tobira recruits, works in human resources at an IT company. Once, when she was still new to the Tobira Project, she was caught up in a conversation with some Tobira who had stayed behind chatting in the Art Study Room after an Accessibility Course session, which covers how the museum should accommodate visitors with various disabilities.

“There were these three older men,” recalls Ms. Shinohara, “who were always playing around – sorry, no, having meetings. They invited me to join them, saying there were snacks, and we all had tea together with the other new recruits.”

That was when Ms. Shinohara found out that the men wanted to organize a badge-making program for the upcoming Turner exhibition. A month later, they brought up the idea again.

“They were repeating everything they’d said the month before, there had been no progress. I was like, ‘Is this going to happen? Do you really want to do this program?’ When they replied that they did, I told them, ‘Well then, we have to get moving!’ I wasn’t really interested in badges at all, so I was only getting involved to help them out.”

Despite her initial intentions, Ms. Shinohara would end up being involved in every installment of the Tobi-Badge Project over her three years as a Tobira.

Original badges

Tobira operating the badge-making machine

The Tobira’s autonomy and role-sharing

There were around ten to fifteen Tobira running the Tobi-Badge Project at the Turner exhibition. As the workshop was designed to allow many people to participate casually, there were large numbers of museumgoers working on their badges simultaneously. By the end of the two days, a total of 518 people had participated.

“I remember it being so busy,” says Ms. Shinohara, “that many of the Tobira weren’t able to take their lunch breaks. That first installment made us realize how much effort it takes to run the program.”

Ms. Shinohara and the others learned their lesson, and for the second Tobi-Badge Project event, held with *Balthus: A Retrospective*, they anticipated the need for a greater number of Tobira.

“For starters, we held a study session to look through the catalog. Then we decided, why not also hold a workshop to make rubber stamps with motifs from Balthus’s paintings, like young girls and cats? We were also hoping to use this workshop as an opportunity to increase the number of Tobira interested in our badge-making Tobi-Labo.”

Ten Tobira participated in the stamp workshop, and, just as planned, the day of the event saw many Tobira helping out. The Tobi-Badge Project calls for a number of roles, such

as greeting and involving museumgoers, explaining how to make the badges, cutting the bases into circles, and so on. Ms. Shinohara and her crew, however, decided not to assign any set roles to specific people. She explains:

"We rotated, telling everyone to make sure to handle several different roles. We were hoping people would look out for each other – noticing, for example, if someone had been at the main desk for over an hour without taking a lunch break, and voluntarily swapping out with them. We trusted in the Tobira to take initiative."

From then on, some Tobira began to participate in the Tobi-Badge Project regularly, coming back for each installment. Ms. Shinohara was one of them, primarily taking charge of the administrative tasks. She made the schedules for the meetings, noted down everyone's ideas and summarized them on "Today's Whiteboard." It was a type of work that she was used to from her day job at the office.

"As a project progresses, you start to get a sense of who is good at what, and then you can begin assigning responsibilities. It's a lot nicer for everyone to act independently, taking on what tasks they're best suited for, than to have a boss figure telling you what to do. But for this strategy to work, we have to set out the schedule, know where the project is and what needs to be fixed, and make that information available to everyone participating. I tried to keep that administrative mindset, which is something that I'm good at."


Ms. Kumiko Shinohara

The "unbadgeable" exhibition

Even as Tobira participants came and went, the Tobi-Badge Project successfully implemented one installment after another, evolving as needed to suit each Special Exhibition. For *The British Museum Exhibition: A History of the World in 100 Objects*, however, the project stalled in its preparatory phase.

"The exhibition featured a hundred artworks and artefacts from the British Museum's collection," says Ms. Shinohara. "It wasn't focused on a single artist, so it was difficult to extract common themes. Plus, the show wasn't limited to paintings: there were also many vessels, sculptures, and other three-dimensional pieces. It was really difficult to find a way to make these objects work on our flat badges. We did a lot of test runs, but none of them worked out."

The team for the *British Museum Exhibition* installment disbanded after a final "better-luck-next-time party," at which the Tobira members debated with the museum staff why

the project had proved unrealizable. Hearing other's opinions – for example, that limiting the final product to badges was too constraining – Ms. Shinohara realized that not all Special Exhibitions could be made into badges. This meeting, however, cemented the unity of the Tobi-Labo team for the next installment, and the Tobi-Badge Project would go on to evolve further.



Making the badges

Accumulating ideas for refining the workshops

With the last installment in which Ms. Shinohara participated before the end of her term as a Tobira – a tie-up with the *Botticelli e il suo tempo* exhibition – the Tobi-Badge Project all but reached its finished form.

Ms. Shinohara explains, "When a figure from mythology or the Bible is depicted in Western painting, they are often shown with their *attribute* – a symbolic item special to each personage. One of the Tobira at the time knew a lot about these symbols and he taught us that, for example, Venus holds an apple, Gabriel holds a lily, and so on. We all really got into it. So we made stamps featuring the attributes that appear in Botticelli's paintings so the visitors could have fun using them in whatever combination."

This time they set up two booths, accounting for the visitor flow. At the first booth, a Tobira explained what attributes were. Then, when the visitors reached the second booth, another Tobira was there to give some examples of these attributes and their respective figures, and guided willing visitors to the workstation. Placemats were set up on a table to clearly demarcate each workspace, along with a list of the attributes, colored pencils, pens – everything visitors needed to design the badge.

"We were able to find a process that really simplified workshop participation. The participants were able to enhance their experiences of the artwork by learning about the attributes, and take home the cute little badges. We had eight placemats set up on the table, so that participants naturally sat at just the right distance from each other. Over its many installments, the project had accumulated a lot of these little tricks and solutions that individual Tobira members had suggested. Collectively, they ended up really improving the workshop."


Worktable with a sign explaining the attributes

Realizations from experience outside the museum

After her term as a Tobira had ended, Ms. Shinohara and a number of former Tobi-Badge Project members rented a gallery space in Taito Ward and held a badge workshop outside of the Tobi for the first time. They had decided to charge a thousand yen for the badge-making workshop and a drink, but turnout was poor and the organizers ended in the red. A program that works well at the Tobi may not be replicable outside the confines of the museum. Yet Ms. Shinohara remains enthusiastic about bringing the Tobi-Badge Project to different regions – she has learned firsthand that good programs come from not giving up in the face of failure.

So it was that Ms. Shinohara and her team left the Tobi-Badge Project to the Tobira Project. Having been passed down from Tobira to Tobira, it remains today – now in its seventh year – an indispensable program at the Tobi.

Born of their own accord: The structure of the Tobi-Labo
Tatsuya Ito

Cultivating the power of listening

One of the Tobira Project's most important themes is "the power of listening." There is a general assumption with museum activities that how one speaks to the visitors is the most important element, but this is not the case. As Mr. Yoshiaki Nishimura says in his Principal Session lecture: "Conversation can only happen when someone is there to listen. If the listener stops listening, the speaker is forced to stop speaking." The dominant figure in a true conversation is not the one who speaks; the listener, rather, has the upper hand.

This way of thinking also comes into play when the Tobira work together as a team. The Tobira's activities are generally run by small teams that are assembled based on interest in a Tobira's idea. These teams then reform anew as necessary for each installment of each program.

The advantage of this system is that it allows for a good match between the substance of the programs and the individual Tobira's personal interests, passions, and talents. If all of the participating Tobira can maintain a high level of motivation, then the programs themselves will, as a matter of course, continue to improve.

The question remains, however, whether such an organically structured team will be able to work together cohesively.

This is where the power of listening truly shines. One might assume that a team requires a leader to really be effective. Let us imagine, however, that we need to put together ten four-person teams. If we put one person in charge of the other three, the structure would be difficult to replicate ten times over: we might not have ten such leader-types among the project's participants.

So, we take the opposite tack. There is no leader: our teams are composed of members whose high-sensitivity antennae are able to pick up each other's half-formed comments, their barest ideas. It is easier and more flexible to create teams that lack a "leader" as their nucleus and are instead based on the power of listening.

When the teams are composed of Tobira who are each able to use their own listening skills to maximize the capacity of the team as a whole, the team's communication improves as a result.

Such are the effects of the power of listening. According to Mr. Nishimura, one can nurture this power by "always listening with the greatest possible interest in what the other person is saying." Having a shared understanding of the value of listening is the secret to bringing out this power in each other and compounding them into something greater.

The “Gather Round” system and the “Everyone Present” system

There is a line in the Tobira Project pamphlet that runs: “What shall we do in this third place?” The idea is to treat the art museum as a *third place* – a place that is not one’s home, not one’s school or workplace – in order to create new value.

People often say that they find art museums intimidating. Yet we can also see them as places removed from everyday life – like shrines and temples – which can fill people with a certain, almost spiritual, power. When you pass through the *torii* gates leading up to a shrine, your posture straightens, and your body becomes cleansed. Similarly, when you enter a museum, you feel that you are in a space that differs somehow from the everyday. We might attribute this to the presence of *real art*.

The Tobi-Labo are a platform where the Tobira can think about what to do in such a place. These projects see the Tobira developing and realizing their own programs. They put to use what they have learned in the Principal and Practical Sessions – or in the course of participating in another program – and approach the entire museum in a creative fashion. Hence the programs’ name, “Tobi-Labo”: the Tobira’s laboratory.

A Tobi-Labo begins when an idea proposed by a Tobira resonates with other Tobira, who then form a small team together. When three or more Tobira have assembled, we have a team. We call this the “Gather Round” system. The team members then set to work in order to realize that idea, combining their individual capabilities, getting a realistic grasp of their limitations, and diligently pushing forward with preparations while consulting curators and university teaching staff. We call this the “Everyone Present” system.

According to Mr. Nishimura, “Any new idea is a combination of pre-existing ideas. So, try to think of new ways to combine your ideas and those of others. Keep this in mind and you’ll be able to enjoy the work, while avoiding overexerting yourself.”

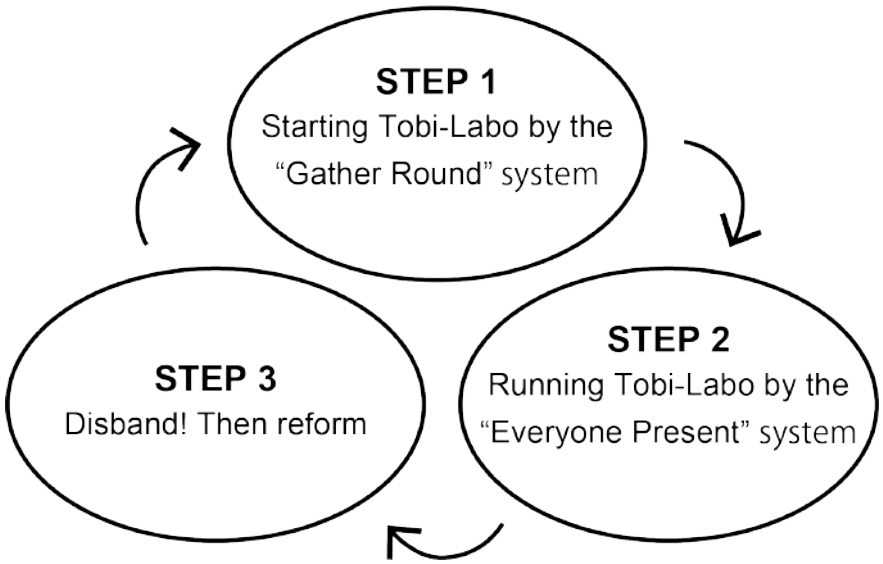
The Tobira are of different ages, professions, backgrounds. They are nevertheless able to engage in tireless dialogue and exchange ideas because of the special nature of the place where they gather, namely the museum.

Art museums house “the real deal” – works of art that continue to be passed down through the years. The universal value of this art creates opportunities for viewers to engage in dialogue, and brings together all kinds of people regardless of age, outlook, nationality, or gender. This also applies to the communication among the Tobira. Precisely because their exchanges revolve around artwork, they are able to temporarily put aside their respective assumptions and biases, and lend an ear to the values and opinions of others with an open mind, using the power of listening.

This setup of the Tobi-Labo allows the Tobira to lend a hand to any program if it resonates with them; if it does not, they are not required to participate. To put it conversely, Tobi-Labo that fail to spark interest are ultimately never realized.

This holds true for programs proposed by the Tobi or by Geidai: the institutions have

no power to force the Tobira to mobilize, or to assign them responsibilities. The fundamental nature of the Tobira Project is that no program or initiative can move forward unless its vision, mission, and passion are properly communicated.



The "Gather Round" system

Accelerating the cycle of activities

One prominent characteristic of the Tobi-Labo is that they have predetermined ends: each program's team decides in advance when and under what circumstances to disband. The timing varies – the team might set a fixed time period or set certain goals that are to be achieved, or, alternatively, they might plan their program as a one-off event. When disbanding, the usual protocol is to first hold a meeting where team members review the program's achievements and failures.

When there arises a new goal or idea for the program, a team is formed afresh, gathering Tobira who have shared values and enjoy working together. With the previously discussed Go with the Tobira Board! and Tobi-Badge Project programs too, the teams dissolve with the end of each run, leaving only the program names behind. And when it is time to prepare for the next installment, a new team is formed out of motivated members both new and old, as according to the "Gather Round" system.

When embarking on new projects on a day-to-day basis, one tends to put all consideration into honing the ideas and devising creative solutions. There are, however, few opportunities to consider how to *conclude* ongoing endeavors, and so projects often end up fizzling out, or dragging on until the participants are worn out. This makes it difficult to carry them forward and build upon the hard-won results. The end of one project is also the beginning of the next – that is why we make sure to structure the ending of our programs from

the very start.

Between the days of the projects' events and the preparations leading up to them, each year the Tobira meet over three hundred times for the Tobi-Labo. This number is so large precisely because the members repeatedly form new teams, review activities, and disband. With this cycle of formation and dissolution, we make room for positive mistakes.

The first thing to do after coming up with an idea is to convert it into action. That lets us make our mistakes early, which in turn allows us to open up fruitful discussions and adjust our original course of action. And then we try again. The Tobira operate on this PDCA (plan–do–check–act) cycle – the proper application of which makes it possible for any idea to grow.

Keeping this cycle in motion requires a certain knack, however. The key is to run this cycle on small scales, and as quickly and as often as possible, having a small number of people try out a lot of small ideas. Then we change the team members and challenge something new. Growth, after all, only occurs with many challenges, failures, discussions, and adjustments.

The repeated cycle of formation, review and dissolution undergone by these small teams of Tobira does not merely contribute to the development of ideas. By creating more opportunities for the 120-some Tobira to communicate with each other, it also promotes the thoroughness and ease of communication among the Tobira, ultimately securing the potential of the project as a whole.

Supportive onlookers creating a nourishing environment

All kinds of ideas come out of the Tobi-Labo. An idea that has only just budded, however, is extremely frail – in many cases, it fails to grow and withers. To develop successfully, these new ideas need the nourishing and accepting environment afforded by supportive onlookers.

We believe that new ideas and activities grow only with the supportive gazes of the other Tobira, which surround them like the margins on a page of text. After all, it is exceedingly difficult for the key players to engage in their vigorous activities without anyone to give them encouragement.

On the other hand, we also encounter Tobira who see their proactive peers at work and lose heart, feeling that, by comparison, they themselves have produced little by way of concrete ideas or results, or that they have not been able to attend as frequently. These find it hard to stay motivated.

This is precisely when our idea of the nourishing environment created by supportive onlookers comes in to play. It is important that these project members realize that observing and admiring another's activities does not imply that they themselves are failing to be active: they are taking on the invaluable and active role of the supportive observer.

For the Tobira Project is not sustained exclusively by the people who conceive and

run its activities. To maintain their motivation, the highly active members need people watching over them supportively, just as a speaker requires a listener. This supportive gaze is yet another example of the “power of listening,” and is an important form of participation in the Tobira Project.

A project web page that amplifies the supportive gaze

The Tobira Project’s “Today’s Whiteboard” web page serves to further visualize this nourishing environment filled by supportive onlookers.”

At Tobi-Labo meetings, participants are always required to make notes on a whiteboard, which they photograph at the end of the meeting and upload to the dedicated web page.

Every stage of each Tobi-Labo is uploaded to Today’s Whiteboard and shared with all Tobira and administrative staff. The number of documented whiteboards over the past six years has reached over two thousand, serving not only as records of the Tobira’s communication but also as a means for the staff to keep track of all the discussions going on in each Tobi-Labo.

One advantage of these whiteboards is that they are like minutes that are pleasing to the eye. The images are all unique, with notes that differ in style from project to project, from note-taker to note-taker; moreover, as the notes are handwritten, they offer a glimpse into the overall atmosphere of the discussion.

This dedicated website also gives Tobira the important chance to leave positive comments on each other’s ideas. This is another example of the power of listening: each member’s knowledge that others are listening to their ideas is what allows the activity to maintain its momentum.

“Today’s Whiteboard” web page


Comments section

Escorting children and people with visual disabilities

Listening and observing also come into play in the Tobira's communication with museumgoers.

The Tobira interact with many different people on the Tobi's Special Days for People with Disabilities. They are sometimes also asked by those with visual disabilities to accompany them as they view the art.

The Tobi receives no small number of visitors with visual disabilities – they come with white canes or led by guide dogs, excited to experience the artworks, even though these are not so-called "touch tours" that invite visitors to touch the artworks. These individuals come to "see the artwork with their very own eyes."

"What is this artwork like?" they ask the Tobira. "It's a painting," the Tobira reply, "about the width of your armspan." Showing off art history knowledge is close to irrelevant in these exchanges.

The Tobira examine the artwork before them closely and attempt to convey some measure of what they see and how it makes them feel. They then listen carefully to the responses they receive and look again at the artwork.

The dialogue that takes place here between the Tobira and the visitor – mediated by the artwork – goes beyond simple verbalization of visual sensations. It is laying bare the essence of an artwork, and "seeing" it together with another being. We realize, here, that seeing is not just to do with light entering our eyes. Even in the absence of vision or touch, anyone can experience the sense of enrichment that comes with seeing something, if its essence can be captured through dialogue.

This is why there are people with visual disabilities who frequent the museum. This enriching sense of "seeing" the artwork, furthermore, occurs for the Tobira as well: it is an experience that transcends ability or disability.

The Tobira also accompany children who come to the museum on school field trips, viewing the artworks with them and engaging in dialogue. These guides do not explain the artworks: they focus on listening to the voices of the children, sharing perspectives and traveling together into the world depicted by the artwork. They thus aim to give children the enriching experience of seeing in the truest sense, using their own eyes, feeling with their own hearts.

Being able to see is not a sufficient condition for this sense of enrichment and satisfaction. The inverse of the Tobira's experiences with people with visual disabilities is that physically seeing a work of art or knowing its concept does not guarantee this true sense of seeing. Once a child has truly experienced seeing a work of art, they will later be able to repeat this experience on their own. Like learning how to ride a bicycle, the children's journey through the world of the artwork begins with the Tobira holding the handlebars – and once the children learn to enjoy themselves, the Tobira gently let go.

The activities of an art communicator do not come with a manual for interacting with

children or with people with disabilities. The individual Tobira must take into consideration the specific context and specific individuals at hand, and act as they see fit. We see again that the Tobira are not volunteers, but key players.

Case 3: “The Scent of Botticelli,” a workshop created with the help of a deaf person

Text: Mao Yoshida

The art museum for those who cannot hear

Among the programs that arose out of the Tobi-Labo, there are some that involve viewing art with people with visual or hearing disabilities. “The Scent of Botticelli: Silent Communication Between Hearing and Deaf People” is one example.

Several hurdles must be cleared for people who cannot hear to enjoy their experience at the art museum. Mr. Shinya Ogasawara (56), who is deaf, says, “There are a lot of museums that assume we don’t need any special support – after all, even if we can’t hear, we can see the artwork.” These visitors, however, may find themselves unable to react when asked at the reception desk how many tickets they want to purchase, or when they receive verbal directions to the galleries. The museum staff may even respond to this with a look of apprehension, putting off such visitors from setting foot again in the museum. It is also rare for audio guides or gallery talks to cater to such visitors by having text versions or sign language interpretation.

Additionally, the welfare industry lacks awareness of the need to proactively improve accessibility at art museums when it comes to sign language interpretation. Ms. Yuko Setoguchi (52), a member of the fourth cohort of Tobira recruits with twenty years’ experience as a sign language interpreter, says:

“Sign language interpreters generally register with the local ward, then are sent directly to people who need their services. These cases are most often related to health or everyday necessities, such as hospital visits or parent-teacher conferences. As this system runs this on taxpayer money, interpreters are not dispatched to offer assistance for personal leisure activities. Going to the art museum is seen as a leisure activity, so even if individuals who are deaf would like to have an interpreter accompany them to an art museum, they can’t request one.” (With the 2016 implementation of the Act for Eliminating Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities, local governance concerning sign language interpreter dispatches is slowly changing.)

Ms. Setoguchi loves art museums herself and visits them often. She believes that the art museum offers more than leisure: it is a place that provides us with healing and realizations that help us to live our everyday lives. She had accordingly spent the previous eight years accompanying people who cannot hear to art museums on her own time.


Workshop announcement

Encounter with a Tobira sets project in motion

As Ms. Setoguchi continued to visit art museums with people who cannot hear, she became increasingly interested by the conversations they would have while looking at the artwork.

"They notice things about the artwork that I miss. For example, they might try to read something into a portrait's expression, look closely at the design of their clothing, or even say something like 'this brushstroke here is fantastic' – they really pay attention to the tiniest details. In my normal interpretation work, it's always just me explaining something to the other person. It's a more equal relationship when we're talking about an artwork."

Ms. Setoguchi began to sense that art museums and social art projects should increase their focus on people who are deaf or hard of hearing. But what could she do to help? The public agency where she was registered as an interpreter was not equipped to implement or support new programs. She felt stuck. Then she met Ms. Mikiko Matsuzaki (48), a member of the second cohort of Tobira. Though Ms. Setoguchi was not yet a Tobira at the time, both women happened to participate in an event at The National Art Center, Tokyo for people who cannot hear. Ms. Setoguchi explained her feelings about art museums as she introduced herself to the group, and was later stopped by Ms. Matsuzaki at the end of the day as she was about to go home.

Ms. Matsuzaki has worked for seventeen years as a therapist for those on the autism spectrum. She had also formerly spent time in New York, pursuing her goal of becoming a photographer. One day, she visited a Harumichi Saito exhibition at the Watari Museum of Contemporary Art. Mr. Saito is deaf, and accordingly used a sign language interpreter for the gallery event. Struck by his artwork and by what he had to say, Ms. Matsuzaki began studying sign language with the idea that she would like more opportunities to communicate in art spaces with people who are deaf. Search as she might, however, few such programs at art museums existed.

Just as Ms. Matsuzaki was about to enter her third and final year as a Tobira, it occurred to her to set up a Tobi-Labo that would allow deaf and hearing people to communicate about art face to face at the museum. This was exactly when Ms. Setoguchi came into the picture.

Ten months of careful preparation

Before Ms. Setoguchi became a Tobira, Ms. Matsuzaki put her in touch with Mr. Shinya Ogasawara (mentioned above), whom she knew through another Tobira. Due to cerebral palsy, Mr. Ogasawara has been deaf from birth. Growing up, his parents often took him to art museums, a pastime he has kept up ever since. When he has time to spare from his job in IT, he goes to visit art museums in and outside Japan. The three wasted no time in making an art museum date to try viewing and discussing the artwork together. What one feels before an artwork is something personal, and the process of communicating this to other people can bring joy to deaf and hearing people alike. After experiencing firsthand the joys of dialogue-based art appreciation, Mr. Ogasawara promised Ms. Setoguchi his support if she were to become a Tobira and set up a project aimed at people who cannot hear.

Ms. Setoguchi sent in her application for the next round of Tobira openings with a week left to the deadline. As soon as she had passed the competitive selection process and had become a Tobira, she set to looking for members for a Tobi-Labo with Ms. Matsuzaki, who had only one year left of her tenure.

The biggest difficulty was that, aside from Ms. Matsuzaki and Ms. Setoguchi, the members had next to no experience with people who are deaf.

“We really had to explain everything to them – what it means to be deaf, what sign language is, and so on,” says Ms. Matsuzaki. “It made us feel the weight of our responsibility. There are some delicate aspects involved in communicating with people who cannot hear. We decided that before setting up the workshop, we had to really make sure people knew about support schemes for people with hearing disabilities, both in terms of their history and ongoing efforts.”

With this in mind, they spent ten months preparing for the first workshop.


Meeting with Mr. Ogasawara

Deepening understanding with the help of a deaf person

Ms. Matsuzaki and Ms. Setoguchi put together a Tobi-Labo for people who are deaf, together with Mr. Shin Kebukawa (44), a member of the fourth cohort of Tobira. They each brought their skills and personalities to the table, taking on different roles: Ms. Matsuzaki contributed her enthusiasm and initiative; Ms. Setoguchi put to use her long experience of serving as a liaison with deaf people as a sign language interpreter; Mr. Kebukawa kept track of the

project's progress and managed the scheduling leading up to the workshop. The project continued to progress.

They invited Mr. Ogasawara to attend their meetings as an "insider." When he first met the Tobi-Labo members, he was struck by their stiff expressions and the weakness of their handshakes. He recalls: "I remember feeling that there really is an invisible wall between people who have hearing disabilities and those who don't. I thought that it wasn't right for the Tobira to run a workshop for people with hearing disabilities, when they were still putting up this mental barrier. So I made it clear that I wanted all the participating Tobira to see me as a living example of someone who is deaf."

Mr. Ogasawara suggested to Ms. Matsuzaki and Ms. Setoguchi that he should mingle with the Tobira and give them a chance to actually interact with a member of their project's target audience. This was his proposed way of supporting the Tobi-Labo.

At the next meeting, Mr. Ogasawara gave a lecture with in-depth explanations of things to pay attention to when communicating with people who are deaf – to make sure to approach them from the front, and so on. Ms. Setoguchi did not provide interpretation.

"Even if you don't understand sign language," Mr. Ogasawara explains, "it's possible to communicate – you can write things down or use body language, even draw letters in the air. I wanted to let them know that they didn't need to be so worried. Hearing disabilities come in many different forms and degrees. Me, I can read lips and speak aloud. Some others can't. When you meet someone with hearing disabilities, all you really need is a desire to get to know them even a little."

There are few opportunities in contemporary society for those who can and those cannot hear to interact with each other. It is lack of understanding about those who cannot hear that leads people to assume that they would not be able to communicate, and to put up a mental barrier. But if they could communicate with the deaf people using senses other than hearing, then the interaction would become more balanced. The Tobira who attended the lecture later posted on the Today's Whiteboard web page, leaving comments such as "It reassured me that we were able to communicate even without sign language" and "I had braced myself more than necessary."

Mr. Ogasawara also participated in the discussions about the shape of the actual workshop. One Tobira admitted that Mr. Ogasawara's eager attempts to communicate with his hands and body made them feel a certain frustration about the difficulty of communication, going on to comment that this frustration – of not fully understanding or being fully understood – was, itself, a core part of communication.

Ms. Matsuzaki sent the Tobira's comments to Mr. Ogasawara by e-mail. "No matter how many times I re-read them, I still feel touched," he replied. At the meetings, he had focused on communicating the following three things: not to treat interacting with people who are deaf as a special event; to realize that there are many ways of communicating with people who cannot hear, not just sign language; to know that people who are deaf open themselves

up to all kinds of people, including those who are non-disabled. In his reply, he expressed his pleasure at having conveyed what he had intended. He also felt encouraged by how the Tobira were trying to apply what they had learned from him in shaping the workshop and their future activities.

Using art to bring hearing and deaf people together

Ms. Matsuzaki, Ms. Setoguchi and their team gradually solidified the content of the workshop while developing a better understanding of people who cannot hear.

Hearing is just one of the five senses; using any of the others allows us to approach those who are deaf on an even playing field. For the Tobi-Labo, they settled on smell, deciding that the workshop should involve sharing their impressions of the artworks through scents. Sign language interpretation would be employed for the first and last parts of the workshop, but for the main portion, speaking would be forbidden for those who could hear, and sign language forbidden for those who could not. The plan was to have participants communicate directly through scent and writing alone.

When they shared their idea with Mr. Ogasawara, he replied, “This must be the first workshop for people with hearing disabilities in Japan to use scent. I say go for it.”

After some trial runs, “The Scent of Botticelli: Silent Communication Between Hearing and Deaf People” was finally held on March 19, 2016. Including members of the public who had applied online, there were sixteen participants: nine who could not hear, and seven who could.

The workshop began in the Art Study Room. Ms. Setoguchi’s interpretation accompanied a program explanation and introductions by all the participants. Mr. Kebukawa, who acted as the program’s facilitator, gave a lecture on how to communicate with people who are deaf. Next, as an icebreaker to ease any tension, the Tobira conducted a game of charades based around Botticelli-related themes. With everyone loosened up, the participants were divided into groups of four to go see the exhibition. Standing in front of the same artwork, both the deaf and the hearing participants used magnetic drawing boards to communicate their feelings and thoughts in writing.

They returned to the Art Study Room, where wood-free paper prints of Botticelli’s religious paintings were waiting on each group’s table, along with scents labeled from one to fourteen. Then began the silent communication, with participants using pens to note down which portions of the paintings evoked which scents.

In this silent world where everyone was equal, the participants explored the similarities and differences in their respective feelings as they matched the artworks and the scents together. For example, one participant drew an arrow to the Virgin Mary in a painting and wrote, “Scent No. 3, which makes you think about the female psyche” – to which another

participant added, “I agree! It’s not overly sweet, just right for Mary.” Yet another wrote, “Are you mainly feeling a mother’s love from this painting?” In another case, the scenery outside a window in the painting was labeled “The smell of water.” This spurred on the exchange: “Why? Is the sea nearby?” “The air seems really pure and refreshing.” Each participant used a different colored pen, making the papers more and more colorful.

The participants, who started out confused by this novel communication method, ended up deeply enjoying the process of attempting to convey their thoughts to each other. According to Ms. Setoguchi, “Smell is supposed to be directly associated with memory, and I think that’s partly what helped keep the communication so lively. Hearing or deaf, every participant was overflowing with personal feelings to share.”

“It made me really happy,” Mr. Ogasawara says, “just seeing everyone get more and more excited about talking together. And I’m still friends with some of the Tobira that I met through the workshop.”

People who can hear and people who cannot usually move in separate communities that have their own fixed ways of engaging with each other. Through trial and error, the Tobira were able to arrive at a unique method of communication that, transcending barriers, gave the workshop participants a communal taste of art, as well as the joy of sharing their inner selves with each other.


Communicating in writing at the Botticelli exhibition


During the workshop


Exchanging impressions on scents through notes

A challenge that required teamwork

Looking back on The Scent of Botticelli, Ms. Setoguchi says, “It was something I definitely could not have realized on my own. It was a success thanks to Ms. Matsuzaki’s passion and

initiative, and Mr. Kebukawa's ability to calmly gauge situations and keep the project moving. A lot of other Tobira helped us out, too. My own thinking had become a little inflexible from working in the field of welfare for so long. It was liberating to realize that by combining art and social welfare, and bringing in a lot of different people, a project could develop so freely."

Ms. Matsuzaki, who ran the meetings and kept the project moving forward, says: "Being driven is not enough. As the project involved amateurs joining people who are deaf in their own world, we needed people involved who could look at the project objectively. Through Ms. Setoguchi, I myself got to learn what the world is like for deaf people."

Mr. Ogasawara says that there are still too few cases of museums stepping up with programs for deaf people like The Scent of Botticelli.

"The Mori Art Museum opened in 2003 and was quick to implement sign language interpretation tours [available on prior request], so there has been progress. Then the Setagaya Art Museum started including sign language interpretation in all of its special exhibition lectures, which I now always look forward to. But when it comes to real, well-structured workshops for people who cannot hear, the Tobira Project's program was a first for me."

Ms. Setoguchi has also begun receiving inquiries from deaf people who want to be more actively involved with art museums.

"Since I became a Tobira, I've begun receiving requests for museum tours, along with all kinds of questions. These people just want to chat with the museum staff or find out what the other museumgoers are talking about – or they simply want to know what's happening at the art museum. It was difficult in the welfare industry to organize initiatives that connect art museums with people who are deaf. But I'm hoping that by having the museum organize the initiatives, we'll be able to do all kinds of things."


Group photo

<u>One project leads to another</u>

A few weeks after the success of The Scent of Botticelli, Ms. Matsuzaki's time as a Tobira came to its "opening" – its end. She is currently developing and running a workshop called "Art Session" in Nerima Ward, where she lives. Art Session is geared toward creating a wide range of opportunities for communication with senior citizens – including those with dementia – and those who support them. After proposing the project to the municipality and the local social welfare council, she began running workshops in facilities such as nursing homes.

Today, she is slowly finding ways to make a career out of it: she has taken her activities beyond nursing homes, running a workshop at the Nerima City Nukui Library too. Ms. Matsuzaki is working on expanding the scope of her activities, in a bid to reach senior citizens who do not live in or visit any facilities, or who have reservations about going to so-called "memory cafes" or local ward offices. "My experience with the Tobira Project – creating a whole new initiative from nothing – was deeply important for me," she says. In her Art Sessions, she uses tools and approaches that were devised for The Scent of Botticelli: improvising dialogues, using a flipbook with the instructions written on them so that those who are hard of hearing can easily understand, and more.

Although Mr. Ogasawara was not a Tobira himself, he was awed by the passion, commitment, and deep love of art shown by the Tobira, and signed up as an art event supporter at the Tokushima Modern Art Museum. There, he helps out with the Universal Museum Project, which aims to create an art museum open to everyone including those with disabilities. He introduced the Tobira Project's activities to resident curators and educators, and as a result, the museum incorporated scent into their pre-viewing training tools for the 2016 exhibition *Sense of Living: Where Art Meets Design* and for their workshops for educators.

Ms. Setoguchi, meanwhile, continued her work as a Tobira, creating the Tobi-Labo "Art Communication in Writing" as an outgrowth of The Scent of Botticelli.

"I felt that the prints from The Scent of Botticelli, which were covered in traces of everyone's conversations, were like works of art in their own right. We created a workshop where people could communicate through drawing pictures with all kinds of materials, expanding the conventional scope of written communication."

After her "opening" as a Tobira, Ms. Setoguchi acquired an EHON therapy® license, wanting to put her experiences in the Tobira Project to good use and continue her involvement with workshops based in various forms of dialogue. She is now working on developing a picture book program for adults that would explore new possibilities of communication.

There are two reasons why The Scent of Botticelli was a success and why it continued to evolve and grow in the hands of its individual participants. One is that the program was created not solely by the hearing, but in collaboration with Mr. Ogasawara, who is himself deaf. Breaking down their preconceptions one by one, both sides found a new way to communicate. The other lies in its emphasis on *process*: the workshop was created through discussions, without placing undue importance on previously determined goals, deadlines, budgets, and so on. This process is, after all, the main characteristic of the Tobira Project.



"Art Session"

 “Art Communication in Writing”

 The board produced by the workshop

Column: “A place where you can be like this”
Yoshiaki Nishimura

Born 1964 in Tokyo. Yoshiaki Nishimura is the director of Living World and an expert on different approaches to work, who creates, writes and teaches professionally. His many publications include *Jibun no shigoto wo tsukuru* (“Make Your Own Job”; pub. Shobunsha/Chikumashobo) and *Hito no ibasho wo tsukuru* (“Creating Places for People”; pub. Chikumashobo). He is an advisor to the Tobira Project.

Involvement with Tobira Project

It’s as if I handed someone a simple handwritten recipe, saying: “How about something like this?” Then, before I know it, the cooking is underway, there’s a crowd of cooks in the kitchen, and side dishes and drinks have been added to the menu. Everyone seems to be enjoying each other’s company as they cook and eat in turn, exchanging comments like “Oh, this tastes great!” or “Maybe a little strong on the pepper?” And I’m there in the corner, thinking: “Wow, so this is how it’s turned out.”

That’s how I see the Tobira Project, having been with the project for seven or eight years – since before the re-opening of the Tobi, which was when the project was launched.

All I suggested at the start to Ms. Inaniwa and Mr. Ito, the project’s core members, was a handful of ideas about running the organization in a wholesome way. What actually made the project effective was the methods that they came up with, like “the power of listening” and the “Gather Round” system. The good sense that they have shown in putting the ideas into practice is far more remarkable than the ideas themselves.

Most significant was the decision – I don’t know how it came about, I guess it was the product of constructive discussions on part of the committee – to include the word “communication” in the basic concept of the newly reopened museum. Envisaging the museum as a place for communication through art – not just for exhibiting and preserving artworks – was what enabled everything that followed.

The social function of museums

To begin with, for us Japanese people – at least for the average citizen – the museum is a

social apparatus that did not have a real place in our consciousness or history, having been unleashed abruptly on the public amid the Meiji Restoration. Though it has been a century and a half since, if we were to ask people today why museums are important or what social function they serve, few would be able to give a concrete answer in their own words.

Whenever I think about this topic, a passage from a book titled *Sarajevo: Survival Guide* (ed. FAMA; pub. Workman Publishing, 1994) comes to my mind. During the Yugoslav Wars, Sarajevo was surrounded by tanks, missiles, sniper rifles: the whole city had practically been taken hostage. Food and water were scarce, and the city's residents were even forced to hew down the trees in their beloved parks to make firewood for warmth. Their everyday life and culture had been turned upside down. And yet, these citizens still gathered once a week in the evening at the local hall and held a communal classical music concert.

This story serves as a reminder of the basic function of culture, faith and other such human enterprises – of the little things and places that people hold dear. They are social instruments that allow us to hold on to our own humanity – assemblages of minute details that help us to live our lives, standing tall even in dire circumstances.

Training to engage with each other

Japan's economic growth was already showing signs of dulling even before the bubble burst. Meanwhile, Earth's natural environment, on which the whole of human society is founded, is becoming increasingly unpredictable. Given all this, I think most people understand, at least subconsciously, that we are entering an age in which we will be forced to make changes to our accustomed way of life.

What are we to do in such circumstances? As I see it, what we should seek more than the answer to this question is attitudes and relationships that will allow us to discuss and create together the roles and initiatives required by the times. We need the ability to discern and produce what we need, in every corner of society – not the ability to live well within a given framework, but an ability to reconfigure that very framework.

This autonomy differs from the kind of counterfeit autonomy that is in fact held down by peer pressure and groupthink. It is an autonomy that allows people to engage with and mutually influence each other, creating something essential in the process. If I said that the Tobira Project was an attempt to equip people with this fundamental ability at the museum, would Ms. Inaniwa and Mr. Ito grow faint at the thought of the heavy burden? Well, that's what I think anyway.

There was a period when concerned parents and citizens' groups across the country started taking it upon themselves to address social issues that couldn't be left up to the government and corporations. The term "volunteer" entered popular use; the concept of the "NPO" would become widespread a while later. Throughout these changes, there has always

been an issue surrounding communication. People with diverse styles of communication gather at sites of civic engagement. Some have spent their adult life focusing on their corporate careers, some on managing their homes as housewives. One runs a store in the shopping arcade, one is attending college, another works for the municipality... In such an environment, one person's hard-wired mode of communication may be different from that of others.

Even when speaking the same language, the authorities and the public often find themselves totally unable to communicate with each other. There is even a book, *The Japanese of the Citizens: The Possibilities of NPOs and Their Communication* (Tetsuo Kato, pub. Hitsuji Shobo) which addressed this very difficulty.

What often happens is that a recent retiree from the corporate world arrives on a scene of a local effort that has been happily run by a group of local mothers. The man then goes on to criticize the way the mothers approach management or conduct meetings, judging their endeavor by his own standards. As a result, the mothers begin to attend less often, finding less joy in their undertaking, and the whole thing falls apart... I have heard of many cases like that over the past two decades. The fact that the last of the baby boomers are now reaching retirement age makes me wonder how things will change.

These complications are not products of ill intention as such, but of misaligned good intentions. It's just that these people, who have different lives, experiences, and values, have not sufficiently developed the social sensibilities and skills necessary for engaging congenially and creatively with each other. They just haven't had the place or opportunity to train such things – I think that's all it is.

What makes for sound organizational activities

Whether it be private or public, I think that there are three main reasons why organizational activities become unsound: the inability to choose who to work with, the inability to communicate with each other, and the inability to terminate when desirable.

The last item, the inability to terminate, is to do with the tendency of organizations to end up setting their own survival as their goal. An organization that fails to dissolve even after it has fulfilled its social purpose is doomed to become unsound: I feel as though many companies and public institutions are already at this stage. Anyway, if we were to invert the above three causes, they might look like the following:

- The ability to choose who to work with
- The ability to engage with each other independently
- The ability to terminate once goals have been achieved

These all relate to the various specific tools that the Tobira Project has implemented, such as the “Gather Round” and “Everyone Present” systems, its focus on “the power of listening,” and its approach of “designing how to end.”

When one is at a loss as to what to do, one needs new ideas. Ideas are, as Vilfredo Pareto puts it, “nothing more or less than a new combination of old elements.” With a design project, for example, this might mean a combination of pre-existing techniques, materials, and potential markets; with the Tobira Project, new ideas are born from the *new combination of people*. Each person brings his or her own knowledge, experience, abilities. The project allows its members to spend their three-year terms trying out different ways of combining these elements, different ways in which to contribute.

We may not know what sort of jobs and initiatives are necessary for the coming era. Nor is the social role of museums self-evident.

But given our ignorance, we should test out new ideas in small measures, and become physically able to produce these new forms. If individual Tobira can acquire this ability in a form that they can take away, then they will be able to apply it in other projects, even after their three-year term has ended. Or, perhaps, those three years will spawn a long-lasting combination that will develop into a new form of activity.

It was seven or eight years ago that I discussed such ideas with Ms. Inaniwa and her colleagues; the rest, as they say, is history.

“A place where you can be like this”

Diverse people, sound relationships, an environment conducive to new combinations – thanks to these factors, the Tobira Project has thus far managed to launch important initiatives and do important work. If society was filled with more of such scenes, then it can surely sort out its problems – can learn how to sort out its problems – through a decentralized and self-organizing process.

For me, the Tobira Project is an endeavor to find out, through real action, the social function that museums should play in future society. It is also a cultural gathering spot, and a training ground for communication skills that society will need to step into the future.

What is particularly great is that the children can clearly see that the grown-ups there are really enjoying themselves too. Once the children realize that it’s fine to be all excited like that, to be fumbling about like that, they may perhaps be able to loosen their grip on the handlebars of their own lives. And if they can come to understand that the museum is *a place where you can be like that*, then, perhaps, that will bring about something wholly new.

Tobira Interview: “How to spend three valuable years of your life”
Shunichi Nagai (Tobira 2015–2018)

Born in 1966. Shunichi Nagai worked for Oriental Land after graduating from university, later assuming a teaching post at the Shibuya Fashion & Art College. He was with the Tobira Project from 2015 to 2018.

After I graduated from the Tokyo University of the Arts, I worked for a theme park company where I designed things like merchandise. I found the job rewarding – it was about showing people a good time, and I saw it as one way of contributing to society. But after experiencing the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami of 2011, I began to want to do more for society. It so happened that one of my colleagues at the time was a Tobira – one of the second batch of recruits – so I decided to apply.

I was busy on weekdays with work, so I mainly participated in the Tobira Project over the weekends. So it was all I could do to just attend the Practical Sessions, and participating in two activities every month – a requirement of the project – was difficult. I was frustrated with myself, just watching my peers as they set up one Tobi-Labo after another.

But at the first-ever meeting, Mr. Tatsuya Ito had said to us: “In three years’ time, everyone here will go out into society and live as art communicators.” That meant that the mission would continue after the end of the project. So rather than beat myself up about not having achieved enough, what I needed to do was to find and take away something that would positively influence my later life. That gave me some confidence, even though I had been a passive observer until then.

The three Practical Session programs (the Accessibility, Architecture, and Art Appreciation Courses) were all truly eye-opening, but the Art Appreciation Course had a particularly big effect on my values.

Until then, I had thought that art was to do with discerning things that cannot be described with words. But then I learned about VTS (Visual Thinking Strategies, a method of enhancing art appreciation through dialogue), which allows people to understand artworks verbally through the repeated exchange of questions and answers. My encounter with VTS led me to realize that art can play a valuable role in society. I decided to attend an intensive course at the Art Resources Development Association (ARDA), an NPO run by Ms. Norie Mitsuki, who was one of the lecturers for the Practical Sessions. There I studied how to facilitate dialogue-based art appreciation.

The Tobira come in all ages, from teens to people in their seventies. But I think that

depending on when you choose to participate in the Tobira Project's activities – which three years of your life to dedicate – it can really change the rest of your life. Personally, my term happened to coincide with a particularly busy period of my life. I wonder how it would have turned out if I had joined in my twenties.

I was a student until I was twenty-five, then worked in design for twenty-five years thereafter. I had no issues at my original workplace and was satisfied with my professional life, so if I had not signed up for the project, I likely would have worked there until retirement. But after leaving the project, I changed jobs and started working at an art college.

I had always been interested in teaching. The college where I work now focuses on lifelong learning, teaching students of all ages: teenage students, working adults, over-sixties in their retirement. It's a lot like the Tobira Project in that sense.

In my classes, the students draw while I go around giving feedback and advice. I am constantly reminded that everything I learned with the Tobira Project – the power of properly listening to another, VTS, how to use the whiteboard – is being put to use in the classroom.

Chapter Two
The Museum as a Community-building Hub

Case 4: “Wonderful Discoveries in Ueno,” a collaboration between museums in Ueno Park

Text: Takako Ijiri

A museum tour on the theme of color: Art & Science Club

It is Sunday morning, and “Wonderful Discoveries in Ueno: Art & Science Club” is set to begin. This is one of a series of programs that take participants around the cultural institutions in Ueno Park, exploring its many wonders and experiencing real art and culture. This particular program is on the theme of color, and is staged at three institutions: the National Museum of Nature and Science (Kahaku), the Tokyo University of the Arts (Geidai), and the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum (the Tobi).

One after the other, children begin to gather at the designated meeting point, a room in Kahaku.

“Nice to meet you!”

Some greet the room enthusiastically. Others seem a little nervous, clutching their mothers’ hands.

“Good morning,” greet the Tobira at the door, who are wearing orange bandanas around their necks. The children receive the same bandanas after attaching name tags and taking their seats, where they chat with the Tobira as they wait for the program to begin.

The day was attended by elementary school students ranging from third years to sixth years, along with their parents and guardians – a total of nineteen people. Joining them were thirteen Tobira and representatives from each of the participating institutions.

It was time to start.

“Good morning everyone,” opens Ms. Chikako Suzuki (32), one of the “Museum Start iUeno” staff and a project research assistant at Geidai’s Faculty of Fine Arts. “Today’s theme is *color*. We will be going to the National Museum of Nature and Science, our entryway to science, to Geidai, our entryway to art, and finally, to the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum.” And so began the introduction.

“Have any of you ever been to a museum?” Ms. Suzuki starts by introducing the nine institutions scattered across Ueno Park. “The National Museum of Nature and Science, where today’s adventure is set, is also called “Kahaku.” Hope you remember this at the end of the day!”

Next, Mr. Tatsuya Ogawa, who organizes educational projects at Kahaku’s Education Division, puts a slide on the projector, showing the Lascaux cave paintings in France. He asks the children, “What colors can you see in there?”

“Blue!” “Brown!” the children call out.

“What are they paintings of?” comes the next question.

“Animals!” “It’s a cow!”

“These paintings were made about twenty thousand years ago. They’re painted on cave walls. What do you think they used to paint them?”

“Stones?”

“Maybe they burned the pictures on.”

“The answer,” Mr. Ogawa tells the children, “is that they used paints made from stone and soil.” He brings out the “Soil Collection,” a specimen box that displays dozens of test tubes containing soils of different colors from all over Japan. This was specially made by the artist Mr. Koichi Kurita on commission from Kahaku, and is an artwork that reflects Kurita’s interest in the colors of nature. The children, peering into the tubes, are enthralled by the subtle gradation of the soils’ colors.

“As you can see,” Mr. Ogawa goes on, “soils come in all types and colors. Museums are places that gather all kinds of things, putting together what we call a collection. Comparing these samples and seeing their differences is one of the museum’s jobs. I want you all to go and see Kahaku’s collections and find all sorts of different colors.”

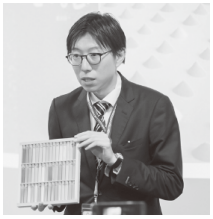
After the introduction, it is finally time to head to the exhibits. The children are each handed a “Museum Starter Pack,” a shoulder bag containing their adventure kit. Inside is a wire-bound guidebook called “Bibihadotokada Book” that also contains the “Adventure Notebook” segment.

“Focus on colors,” advises Ms. Suzuki, “and see what discoveries you make. When you notice something, please record it in your Adventure Notebook!”

At this point, the children split up from their parents or guardians, so that both parties can enjoy the exhibits on their own terms. The children head to the “Minerals in Japan” area in the Japan Gallery, while the adults head towards the “Tree of Life” and “Rocks and Minerals” areas in the Global Gallery. Both groups are accompanied by Tobira.


Art & Science Club


Ms. Chikako Suzuki

 Mr. Tatsuya Ogawa

 Koichi Kurita's "Soil Collection"

Off to the gallery, Adventure Notebook in hand

The gallery is filled from wall to wall with different minerals. "Mineral," however, is a broad term that covers many different shapes, sizes, and of course, colors.

"Are there any colors that catch your attention?" asks a Tobira.

"Blue. It's sparkly."

"Yeah, it's really sparkly."

"Ooh, this one is glossy."

"There's lots of colors."

"This one has a funny shape."

Some children diligently report their every finding to the Tobira; others quietly stand before the exhibits.

"Any particular ones you like?"

"I don't know what to make of this one."

The children open their Adventure Notebooks and record the shapes and names of the exhibits, and where each was found. There are those who focus on sketching a single mineral, and those who observe and draw as many exhibits as possible. Their approach to observation and documentation is various.

One child stands in front of the exhibits, confused as to how to go about viewing them. A Tobira approaches and asks, "If you were to take one of them home, which one would you choose?" The child immediately goes off to search around the room with a twinkle in their eye.

Next up is a section called "Nature of the Japanese Islands." Specimens of marine life are on display in an area that describes the characteristics of the waters surrounding the Japanese Archipelago. There is a child gazing into the glass case, rooted to the spot. After standing next to him for some time, a Tobira asks him: "Did something catch your attention?"

"That fish," replies the boy, an elementary school third-year. He seems to be intrigued by a fish with a distinctive dorsal fin, and begins sketching it in his Adventure Notebook. The

Tobira quietly holds out to him a box of colored pencils, from which the boy carefully selects some colors. With them, he draws the pointed mouth of the fish, its small yet bulging eyes, its jagged fins.

“I was amazed by how observant he was,” recalls Ms. Sachiko Ueda (58), the Tobira in question. “At first sight, it was a pretty unremarkable fish specimen. But the boy kept discovering more and more things about it. I witnessed him learning through the act and process of drawing.”

Some kids are crouched down, staring into the display case in an area that explains the characteristics of soils in different climates, and of the insects and plants that inhabit them.

“This one says ‘typical weathered red-yellow soil.’”

“It’s so red.”

“Why is it so red?”

A volunteer from Kahaku, who happens to be in the gallery, chips in, “The same soil can be of totally different colors.”

The children thus spend their time in the gallery in their own ways, not forced to adhere to a set route around the rooms. They do not need captions to deepen their understanding. The Tobira are there to listen and ask questions so that the children can cultivate their understanding freely. One Tobira is assigned to each child for the day’s program, allowing the children to explore the galleries with considerable freedom, based on their individual approach to viewing the exhibits. This is crucial for giving the children autonomy in their viewing experience.

Ms. Ueda says, “The child I was with that day was the type that needs some time to get properly engaged. It took a while for him to start sketching in the Adventure Notebook, but once he had picked up his pencil, he was totally focused on capturing the smallest details.”

After their tour of the exhibition rooms, the group returns to the room where they started. There is more chatter in the room than there was in the morning. It seems that their initial nerves have settled.

“What did you all discover?” asks Ms. Suzuki. “Let’s all hear about each other’s discoveries.”

In small groups, the children show each other their Adventure Notebooks and share their discoveries.

The Tobira asks the children what they found, and the children answer one by one.

“Fluorite.”

“Aragonite.”

“The same rock came in darker and lighter colors.”

Every time someone opened their notebook, some of the children would crane their necks to get a better look.


A child and Tobira enjoying an exhibition


Sketching in the exhibition room

The children try their hand at making paint

With the activities in Kahaku over, the group moves to Geidai – the venue for the afternoon – and take a lunch break. The children and their accompanying adults talk about the morning as they eat lunch.

After lunch, the group reassembles in the Oil Painting Technique and Material studio in the Faculty of Fine Arts. There to greet the group is Associate Professor Meo Saito and her research assistant, along with some masters students.

“Welcome to Geidai,” they say to the group.

In the afternoon program, the adults go on a tour of Geidai with Ms. Saito, while the children take part in a paint-making workshop.

“Do you know what paints are made of?” asks Ms. Gin Hasegawa, Ms. Saito’s research assistant. “They are made of ‘pigments’ and ‘binders.’ ‘Pigment’ is a word for colored powder, which can be made from familiar materials like stone and clay.” The children think back to the rocks and soils they saw in Kahaku that morning.

“Is anyone familiar with the history of paint? In the olden days, it was difficult to grind and mix materials, so painters’ apprentices would spend half a day preparing paint in places called ateliers. Then, as technology evolved over time, machines were invented that made this process easier. Today, we will be making watercolor paint out of soil and gum arabic. We’ll make four colors, with the groups covering one color each.”

The children go about carefully blending these materials together on a marble palette, using a special paint-mixing stick made of stone.

“I feel like a pastry chef,” says one of the children in the group working on burnt amber, all excited. “We’ve got some great chocolate here.”

“Don’t eat it!” their laughter echoes around the room.

The other three pigments were “green earth,” “yellow ocher,” and “light red.”

“This one feels thicker when I mix it.”

“Try adding some water.”

“Ooh, the texture changed.”

Conversation grows lively as they get on with their work.

“What do you want to be when you grow up?” ask the Tobira.

“I don’t know yet,” responds one child. “But I like science experiments, so I want to be able to do stuff like that.” The conversation continues to develop, turning to topics beyond the workshop.

“Is everyone finished?” asks Ms. Hasegawa. “If you are, please exchange your palettes with the other groups.”

Using the four completed colors, the children draw lines on a piece of card as color samples. Trying out the paints leads to new discoveries.

“Oh look, the hardness is different with different colors.”

“Different materials,” explains Ms. Hasegawa, “absorb moisture differently. They also start drying up even while we’re making the paints. It’ll soften again if you add water.”

When the paints are ready, it is time for the children to put them to use, drawing whatever they like with the paints they made. Some paint by layering one color over another, while others draw landscapes. Soon, they each complete their work, just as the parents come back to join them. The adults take a look at what the children have been working on.

“We made paint!” says a child, showing off a small container. Some parents express their surprise at the finished products.

Finally, the group visits the Tobi. After spending some time appreciating the watercolor and oil paintings at the *Van Gogh and Japan* exhibition, the group heads home. So ends the day-long workshop on the theme of color, which saw how paints are produced from stones and soils and transform into paintings, then are preserved for centuries.

For one child, the highlight was making all sorts of discoveries; for another, it was observing and contemplating things more carefully than usual at Kahaku. One was excited to learn in the paint-making program that paint – something they use often – had once been regarded as precious. Each child who participated took away something different.

Meanwhile, the adults have also learned something new. Though adults and children both participate in Wonderful Discoveries in Ueno, they follow separate programs during the day. One parent notes, “It was very enjoyable participating in the program – not just to accompany the children, but to spend some time thinking in the company of other grown-ups, which I don’t often get to do. I had fun myself, and it was lovely to see the kids observing things and expressing themselves with passion.”

Another remarks, “The program at the science museum involved artistic activities like painting, while the program at the art university had scientific elements like measuring and mixing – this was unexpected and made for a fresh experience.”

It would be ideal if, even after the participants go home, the parents and children can share their thoughts and impressions with each other.


The paint-making workshop


Mixing paint on a marble palette

Sharing a story and aiming for the same goal

"This installment of the Art & Science Club," Ms. Suzuki tells us, "was planned with the Kahaku staff based on previous workshops."

The contents of the programs are decided every year through discussions between representatives from each institution. During discussions with Mr. Ogawa and the Kahaku team, Ms. Suzuki brought up the previous year's program, commenting on how great it was to view Kahaku's beautiful, authentic minerals up close. In response, the Kahaku staff mentioned a past workshop at their museum that involved making paint from rock minerals. They thus settled on an idea for the upcoming program: an art and science workshop on making paint, with a focus on the colors of rocks.

At the suggestion that a paint-making program should surely seek Geidai's cooperation, the team consulted the university's Oil Painting Technique and Material studio. Deciding that the workshop should conclude by taking participants to observe real artworks, they added the Tobi's gallery to the list of destinations. Thus came about the collaboration between Kahaku, Geidai, and the Tobi.

"But in reality," says Ms. Suzuki, "capitalizing on the best of all three institutions in putting together a single, streamlined workshop is harder than one might imagine." Within their already busy work schedules, the representatives from each institution met up to discuss and confirm the workshop's flow. There were many points to straighten out: how to convey the program's theme to the children, how to break the ice at the start, what route to take inside the institutions. "We addressed concerns raised by Ms. Saito and Ms. Hasegawa from the Oil Painting Technique and Material studio about the paint-making session and its equipment, and by Mr. Ogawa from Kahaku about the general flow of the day and the set-up for the workshop. And we carried out repeated simulations with several staff members to sort out issues about logistics on the day of the program.

This year, one of the children scheduled to participate was an elementary schooler who required the use of a wheelchair. So the team carefully considered how to navigate the

institutions and Ueno Park, how the paint-making program could best accommodate someone in a wheelchair and so on, involving his parent in the discussion. Although he ultimately had to cancel due to heavy rain on the day, the team did its best to ensure that every child would be able to participate, regardless of any disabilities.

After the end of the program, the staff from each institution gathered to reflect on the day.

“The opening part is crucial with workshops for children,” said Mr. Ogawa. “I think that ninety-percent of how they respond to the experience hinges on how we talk to them at the start. In hindsight, our explanations to the children could have been prepared more thoroughly with Ms. Suzuki, the facilitator. I feel it’s important to have many different patterns ready, and to make sure that the staff is all on the same page.” There is no such thing as perfection; all of this adds to the team’s experience.

Ms. Hasegawa, the Oil Painting Technique and Material studio’s research assistant, commented that the main challenge was building within the limited timeframe an effective program that balanced what the ideal scenario would be, what the staff can put together, and what the children are capable of doing. It was thanks to Ms. Hasegawa’s scrupulous preparations that the team was able to make sure that the key lessons of the program were covered, while securing enough time for the children to work.

“We allocated thirty minutes to the rocks and minerals area in Kahaku,” Mr. Ogawa reflected. “I was worried that it might be too short, but after the program had ended, it felt right. It’s important to take a ‘minimalist’ approach, taking care to construct a program that is not too densely packed – that even elementary schoolers will be able to focus on without getting bored.”

Ms. Suzuki added: “Although this may seem obvious, the staff needs to start by visiting the other institutions and building relationships with their representatives. I became freshly aware of how important this is for a collaborative initiative between multiple institutions.”


Focusing on mixing paints

Taking home their discoveries as souvenirs

What expectations did the parents and guardians who participated in Wonderful Discoveries in Ueno have for the program? The preliminary questionnaire yielded answers such as “I would like my son to learn how to look at things properly” and “I want my daughter to have an

experience that exercises her senses." For such an experience to be possible, the accompanying role of the Tobira is indispensable.

Ms. Hasegawa reflects: "It was striking to see not only the children but the Tobira enjoying themselves too during the paint-making workshop. When trying to communicate something to children, I think it's important for the adults to be having a genuine experience too."

The Wonderful Discoveries in Ueno workshops reveal two important elements: a carefully prepared program that allows adults and children to learn from each other, and an equal relationship with the children that does not force-feed them pre-existing values.

Wonderful Discoveries in Ueno offers other programs with innovative themes, which show participants around a rich variety of artistic, cultural and scientific institutions, capitalizing on the full potential of Ueno Park. Listed below are a few examples of past collaborative programs between these institutions, which all revolve around adults and children carefully observing and studying exhibits of various kinds.

- Architecture Club
    - Tokyo Bunka Kaikan, National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum
        - An architecture tour around buildings designed by two prominent architects: Le Corbusier and Kunio Mayekawa.
- Art & Animals Club
    - Ueno Zoological Gardens, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum
        - A workshop based on the theme of color, which looks at the colors in the museum's artworks and the colors of birds at the zoo.
- Artist Club
    - International Library of Children's Literature (National Diet Library), Tokyo University of the Arts, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum
        - A workshop in which children create their own maps and conduct fieldwork in the International Library of Children's Literature and Ueno Park, after meeting an artist.

According to Ms. Suzuki, "There seem to be many families that, despite having been to zoos, science museums and history museums, have yet to visit an art museum, put off by its more impenetrable impression. We want children to come to Ueno as often as possible and visit all kinds of museums. We'd like our Wonderful Discoveries in Ueno programs, in which the children are accompanied by the Tobira, to serve as a starting point for them."


Architecture Club


Art & Animals Club

The children's adventure begins in Ueno

All children who participate in the Museum Start iUeno programs (open to children from first year of elementary school to final year of high school) – including Wonderful Discoveries in Ueno – are given a free Museum Starter Pack. This was developed as a starter kit that would allow the children to make the most of the museums. Inside this small white shoulder bag are a book containing the Adventure Notebook and a guide for enjoying the nine cultural institutions in Ueno Park. The kit allows children to visit the various institutions and record their observations and discoveries in the Adventure Notebook, using it as a kind of scrapbook. On the outside of the white bag, children can attach nine badges – one for each institution – which have been specially designed by Mr. Katsuhiko Hibino, the project's head of research. The idea is that the goal of collecting all nine badges will give children the initial motivation to visit all of the museums. The cover of the wire-bound book has on it a colorful reflective sticker, bearing the inscription "bibihadotokadabu." This is an acronym constructed from the Japanese words for each of the nine types of institutions: "bi" for *bijutsukan* (art museum), "ha" for *hakubutsukan* (museum housing artifacts of cultural or scientific significance), "do" for *dobutsuen* (zoo), and so on. The word is also the magic spell that the children must utter to receive a badge at the "Bibitto Point" found in each institution. As they playfully repeat this spell, the children eventually familiarize themselves with the nine institutions.

Moreover, the Adventure Notebooks that the children fill in during their museum visits are designed to be scanned and uploaded to the iUeno website. That way, visitors can share in other people's experiences at the museums. To date, around ten thousand children have received the Museum Starter Pack, and the website is filling up with records of their adventures.

Gento Yamazaki showed us his favorite page from his Adventure Notebook, which he made when he was in his fifth year at elementary school. He says, "I went to the *Japanese KIREI* design exhibition [put on by the cosmetics firm Kao] at Geidai's University Art Museum

in 2014. It was interesting to see old and new packaging designs side by side – you could even compare the weights of products. Soap used to be very heavy, and it would slip right out of my hand. The bottles that glowed like Christmas lights were pretty too." His Adventure Notebook is filled from cover to cover with records of his observations and reflections from the exhibition. "Initially, I only used a pencil, but I started using pens to make it more colorful, also adding colorful borders and pasting bits of paper on the pages."

Gento's mother told us how the Adventure Notebook enhanced the quality of the viewing experience. "When we visited museums before then, Gento would only make brief comments like 'It's pretty.' But now he spends time poring over every exhibit."

The records of the children's adventures – including Gento's – can be viewed on the "Everyone's Adventure Notebook" page on the iUeno website. Learning what wonders others encountered can increase the children's motivation to visit the museums. The children's adventure logs are also a valuable archive that offers new insights to adults.

 Museum Starter Pack

 "Everyone's Adventure Notebook" gallery page

Museum Start iUeno: A learning design project
Sawako Inaniwa

Collaboration between nine cultural institutions in Ueno Park

Tokyo's Ueno Park is extremely compact compared to some of the parks found in cities such as New York or London. The park may be unmatched, however, in terms of its concentration of cultural facilities, boasting over ten institutions of different sizes. It is easy to travel between these institutions scattered about the park. As such, if they could take advantage of this setting and coordinate with each other, they have the potential to be more than discrete *points* of interest, but an *area* of interest. The institutions, however, are run by different entities, and coordinating them is no easy matter. Though they had frequently collaborated on promotional efforts, few attempts had been made to interconnect the attractive contents housed by each institution. Then came an opportunity for progress.

The year was 2012, and Tokyo was working on its ultimately successful bid to host the 2020 Olympics and Paralympics. Amid that current, Ueno Park came to receive greater recognition as one of Tokyo's key cultural hubs, and there were increasing expectations for cultural programs that would cater to families with young children. It was in response to this demand that we proposed a collaborative learning design project – Museum Start iUeno – which would tie together the nine cultural institutions in Ueno Park. It was in July that the Tokyo Metropolitan Government and the Tokyo Culture Creation Project Office (now renamed Arts Council Tokyo) approached us about the possibility of a new program – only half a year to go until the project was supposed to start. But when the Tobira Project was still in development, we had already entertained the possibility of expanding the scope of activities to the entire park. This made it possible to get the new program ready in time.

The program was financed by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government. The operating cost was around 8,000,000 yen (75,000 USD) including the production costs for the starter kits: this worked out at around 20,000,000 yen (188,000 USD) per year in total, counting salaries and miscellaneous expenses. Two permanent project members were assigned to the project, along with one specialist staff member working on the program for four days a week. As with the Tobira Project, the programs were primarily managed by a mixed team of Tobi and Geidai staff, with its headquarters installed at the Tobi. The staffs at the other institutions were at first taken aback by this abrupt proposal from the Tobi and Geidai; but eventually, having received their consent and cooperation, we managed to launch the project in the spring of 2013. A project such as Museum Start iUeno stands or falls on whether or not the people involved can continue to identify with its cause and find meaning in it. For this reason, we decided to take it slowly, spending a few years to carefully brush up the project's structure while maintaining a good relationship between the constituent institutions. So it was that we launched the project, intending to refine it in the process of running it.

The start of the project

Museum Start iUeno takes its inspiration from a project called Bookstart, which originally began in the United Kingdom. Bookstart Japan's website says the following: "Our catchphrase is 'Share books with your baby!' The idea is not just to *read* books but to *share* books, spending an enjoyable time flicking through picture books with your baby. This initiative was set up with the aim of giving this opportunity to all babies."[3] First launched in 1992, Bookstart has since spread worldwide. Having been introduced to Japan in the 2000s, it is now part of medical check-ups for newborn babies in municipalities across the country.

I myself had the pleasure of experiencing the Bookstart scheme at my son's four-month check-up. First, all parents and babies receiving the check-up choose a picture book and have it read to them. Then they are handed a "starter kit" to take home: a cloth bag containing the book that was read to them, a local library card bearing the name of the baby, and a guide to using the library. Though the session lasted no longer than fifteen minutes, it was enough to show me the value of "sharing books" – of spending quality time looking at a picture book with one's child – and the project's earnest concern for the well-being of parents and children.

Inspired by this wonderful initiative and its impact, I began to fantasize about an analogous "museum start" project that would let all children experience visiting museums. Would it be possible to establish a far-reaching system that allowed grown-ups and children to share exciting experiences at the museum, just as Bookstart allowed them to share the experience of reading a picture book? So it was that Museum Start iUeno started in 2013 under the slogan: "Give all children a chance to experience museums! Let's go on a museum adventure."

The aim of Museum Start iUeno is not simply to offer children cultural experiences. Rather, the goal is to establish the museum as a place to connect people through its cultural treasures, a social mechanism that creates connections. In order for us human beings to live together happily, we need to be able to feel connected to society, and to nurture sensibilities that can accept the diversity of others. This is the goal that this project seeks to promote with the help of artworks and cultural artifacts.

Museums house real objects of value filled with the love and thought that have been poured into them by human beings. By coming into contact with this energy that such articles hold, children can learn not only other people's values, but their own.

People have valued different things in different countries and eras. Learning about

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[3] Bookstart Japan
http://www.bookstart.or.jp/

diversity and individuality through such encounters with “real deals” will allow children to acquire a perspective that is distinct from that taught in the classroom. This experience will prove extremely valuable for the children as they go on to lead their lives in society. The museum is a place that diligently communicates through its cultural assets human thoughts that have survived for millennia. Experiences at the museum will ensure that both children and adults are granted opportunities to connect with diverse cultural values from around the world.

The important thing here is that the children are accompanied on their activities by the Tobira, whose presence and power of listening could be said to be the crux of Museum Start iUeno. When there are people nearby who take an interest in what they have to say, children are naturally inclined to share their discoveries. The Tobira are partners who accompany the children on their adventures, enriching the communication sparked by the cultural artifacts.


Museum Starter Pack

The Tobira, the children’s fellow iUeno adventurers

To a large extent, how much enjoyment participants get out of the Museum Start iUeno workshops depends on the Tobira who adventure with them into the museum. In 2013, however, when the project was still in development, we had underestimated the importance of the Tobira’s role. The reason was that the planning for Museum Start iUeno began in the summer of 2012, when the Tobira Project was itself still young; the full power of the Tobira had yet to become apparent.

Museum Start iUeno’s programs are first planned by the administrative team of Tobi and Geidai staff, who construct the outline and scenario of the workshop. Then the Tobira get involved, creating a collaborative learning experience between the adults and the children, thus enriching the experience yet further. This means that, at least for the programs whose dates are decided in advance at the start of the fiscal year, there is a two-tier structure in place: the basic outline of the workshop designed by the core staff, and the Tobira’s contributions.

Incidentally, there was one particular concern during the planning stages. This was that the Tobira’s activities are all wholly voluntary: each Tobira participates out of their own free will, without any obligations. As such, we had to prepare for the event that no Tobira wanted to participate in Museum Start iUeno. The staff, therefore, devoted its time and effort

to explaining the aim and significance of Museum Start iUeno to the Tobira from the earliest days of the project.

Fortunately, this worry turned out to be unfounded, as a huge number of Tobira ended up participating in the project. Moreover, the value of the art communicators' involvement became more and more evident with each event.

In our initial vision for iUeno, we had two intentions for the Tobira's involvement: firstly, that their presence at the workshops for children would create a collaborative experience between children and adults; secondly, that the programs would be a learning experience for the Tobira themselves.

The Tobira Project's Principal Sessions and Practical Sessions (further divided into the Art Appreciation, Accessibility, and Architecture Courses) offer many learning opportunities; but attending seminars is not enough for the Tobira to gain a comprehensive understanding of the workshops, or to learn to organize and execute their own programs. It is only by attending the real workshops and playing a part in shaping their settings that they can attain genuine understanding.

Once the programs began, we found that the Tobira were highly motivated to take part in the workshops: this was perhaps natural, given that they had joined the project of their own accord. What is more, they were thoroughly enjoying the workshops themselves. It also gradually became clear that sharing learning opportunities with grown-ups, who are themselves enjoying the experience, had a greater effect on the children than we had supposed.

I believe it was around the end of the first year that we reached this realization. This was particularly palpable from the "Special Monday Course" for schools, and the "*Nobi-nobi Yuttari* Inclusive Workshop," whose participants included many children with disabilities. We felt acutely that the adults' attitude of active learning and participation, and their positivity toward building human relationships, rubbed off on the children. Movies showcasing these programs' activities are available for viewing on our website.[4]

We often refer to the Tobira's role in our programs as "fellow adventurers" or "accompaniers." They join the children on their adventures, sometimes listening to the children and offering support, like someone following alongside a marathon runner. What is key here is that the Tobira are there to learn too. When taking part in activities with children, adults have a tendency to think that they have to play the role of the "teacher"; but it is far more important to be "active learners" seeking to discover and understand things for themselves. Rather than face each other, the children and the Tobira both face and observe the same objects, ideally forming a triangular relationship. The presence of these mediating objects removes any sense of hierarchy between adults and children, allowing for lively

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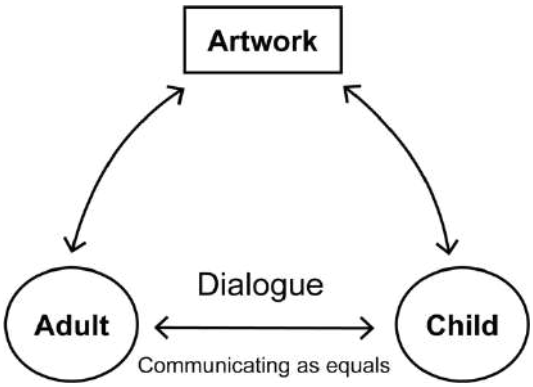
[4] Movies of the Special Monday Course and the *Nobi-nobi Yuttari* Inclusive Workshop
http://museum-start.jp/about/movie

communication.



Fostering dialogue through objects

Case 5: The “Special Monday Course,” a day for encountering real art

Text: Takako Ijiri

The artworks triggering something in the children

One Monday afternoon, a bus pulled up near the Tobi. Fifth graders from the Iriya Elementary School in Adachi Ward stepped off the bus, along with their art teacher, Ms. Ryoko Goto. They were here yet again for this year’s “Special Monday Course.”

The group was welcomed by the Tobira in the Art Study Room, and after an exchange of greetings, was briefed on the program. When they had a rough idea of the day ahead, it was finally time for them to encounter real artworks in the galleries. As the exhibition was closed off to other visitors, it was very quiet inside.

The children and Tobira, stopping in front of different artworks that caught their attention, began conversing. On the children’s faces, which initially showed some nervousness, there were subtle hints of a smile.

On the Special Monday Course, schoolchildren visit the museum on a Monday when exhibitions are closed to the public, and attend a class in the gallery in a relaxed fashion. It is a popular program even among the lineup of Museum Start iUeno’s activities. Inside the venue, which is opened exclusively for the children, the Tobira lend an ear to the children, deepening their appreciation of the exhibits through communication. From preparing the preliminary lesson to the day of the program, the participating school can also receive support from the museum curators and university staff.

Contrary to what one might expect, the museum staff is extremely busy on days when exhibitions are closed. These days are typically filled with tasks that can only be done when visitors are not around, such as replacing exhibits, servicing air conditioners, and photographing or filming inside the venue. Every year, however, the Tobi dedicates four of these days – which are crucial to the museum’s operations – to the Special Monday Course. The program is open to young people from kindergarteners in their last year to high-school students, and accepts up to three schools for each of its days. A school that wishes to participate can register through the official website, and if the number of applications exceeds the maximum capacity, the schools are entered into a ballot.

One reason for the popularity of this program is that it provides transit: a free chartered bus is available to take participants to and from their school. For many schools, this is partly what ultimately allows them to apply.

“Our first application to the program,” says Ms. Goto, “was for the 2012 *El Greco’s Visual Poetics* exhibition. At the time, I was working for the Matsuba Elementary School in Taito Ward, and in my second year as a schoolteacher. I was vaguely entertaining the idea of teaching an art appreciation class in a museum, when by pure coincidence, the headmaster

told me about this program."

It had been "School Monday," the precursor to the Special Monday Course, to which Ms. Goto had applied. This program was born just when the recently renovated Tobi was searching for ways to collaborate with schools. The entire content of the course was tailored to Ms. Goto's wishes by the curators, Ms. Kazumi Kumagai (42) and Ms. Sawako Inaniwa, who work on the museum's Art Communication Programs.

"The museum proposed an outline," says Ms. Goto, "by which the children first split up into groups and view the artworks while discussing them, then freely explore the exhibition afterwards on their own. After further discussions, we decided to have each child pick one colored chip from a selection of 1,500 different options, asking them to choose a color that described their mood that day. Our intention was to have the children focus on colors to make it easier for them to acquaint themselves with the paintings."

As expected, the colored chips captured the children's interest, and each of them gave serious thought to choosing their color. Moreover, this initial process sparked conversations between the children and the Tobira, who would point out colors in the paintings that matched the children's color of choice. Through such measures, the children were able to gradually engage with the world of El Greco's religious paintings, which are often thought of as a little inaccessible.

"I was particularly glad," recalls Ms. Goto, "when a boy, who usually has trouble engaging in art classes, pointed out to me a snake in an obscure corner of a painting."


Children getting off the bus


Introductions


Special Monday Course at the El Greco exhibition

<u>Preparations, refinements, and obstacles</u>

Nowadays, with more classes devoted to compulsory subjects such as English, art classes are suffering from a lack of time. Although many teachers believe, like Ms. Goto, in the importance of teaching children through viewing art, it is difficult to gain the approval of schools on such matters as visiting museums.

According to Ms. Goto, “More than anything else, it’d be difficult without the understanding of the headmaster and the teachers in charge of the various classes. After all, it was because the headmaster suggested it to me that I myself was able to make this a reality.”

On the day of the event, the children were supervised not only by Ms. Goto, who first proposed the visit, but also by several other teachers. Many of the adults were not very familiar with museums themselves. It often happens that these teachers too come to realize through the Special Monday Course how enjoyable it is to converse about artworks. They sometimes arrive with the preconception that museums are inaccessible places where the children would be prohibited from talking; but after watching the artworks inspire communication between the children and the Tobira, they go away with a newfound understanding of the value of the program.

Putting together such an enriching class requires thorough preparations. The museum staff told Ms. Goto that, before their visit, most children think of the art museum as somewhere inaccessible, stressing the importance of the preliminary lesson. Ms. Goto took this on board and conducted a lesson to teach the children about visiting the museum, using the “Art Cards” (color prints of exhibited works) that come in the Art-Viewing Box, a set of teaching materials loaned by the museum. Furthermore, she spent some time discussing museum etiquette, such as not running, not touching exhibits, and talking quietly inside the galleries. She says that the children, through such preparations, came to look forward to going to the museum. Whether or not the children have a fulfilling experience at the museum on the day depends largely on their teacher’s thorough preparations.


Art-Viewing Box containing Art Cards and other materials

<u>The fun of enjoying art with someone else</u>

Every year since 2012, Ms. Goto has participated in the Special Monday Course with children in different grades. Even though she transferred to another school during this period, she has continued to participate, establishing a supportive environment at the new school by gaining the understanding of her colleagues. What is it that drives her?

“I want to give every child the same opportunity to see art, no matter what school they go to or where they live. There are many who have yet to visit an art museum, but I think that they are at the perfect stage in their development to experience the museum, especially the older elementary school students. Works of fine art are not worth simply knowing about – it is through actually seeing them at the museum that children grow to appreciate them.”

There is also value in experiencing art in the company of others, not just on one’s own. In particular, doing this while communicating not with family members or schoolteachers, but with the Tobira – who have trained their skill to listen – is an experience that one can rarely have in one’s everyday life.

“Both children and adults can enjoy looking at art with other people. It’s an experience that makes you realize things you wouldn’t do by yourself, and I witnessed the children naturally opening up to the artworks on display. Thoughts came pouring out of the children – even those who were shy at first – as they chatted with the Tobira. On the bus ride back to school, seeing the children drawing away in their Adventure Notebooks totally made me forget about the busy day,” laughs Ms. Goto.

Coming into contact with real art, viewing artworks with others, sharing one’s own thoughts – Ms. Goto sees great potential for learning in all these elements of the program.

“The new National Curriculum Standards will be implemented in 2020. The standards propose that ‘as part of the improvements that will be made to lessons with a view to achieving proactive, interactive and authentic learning, we will make efforts to utilize museums, consolidating learning activities such as those involving viewing art.’ The Special Monday Course is a program with this exact aim. The experience of appreciating art based on dialogue is a means for acquiring deeper learning, which benefits everything else the children learn at school. I’d recommend it to teachers at every school.”


An exercise with Art Cards

<u>The free charter bus making the extracurricular activity possible</u>

The Special Monday Course is not just for public elementary and junior high schools. Other educational establishments that come on the program include municipally run learning centers for children who cannot attend school or are facing difficulties of some nature.

Yuukari Kyoshitsu is one such center, which is run by Tama City for pupils at its public schools who are unwilling or otherwise unable to attend school. Rather than only help its pupils return to school, it also aims to teach the joy of learning through its various activities,

providing a comforting space for study. Its classroom is open every weekday from 8:45 a.m. to 4 p.m. The students are mainly left to study on their own, but can also receive one-on-one learning support, based on their individual academic proficiency. Moreover, by coordinating with each school, Yuukari Kyoshitsu ensures that attendance at the center is counted toward the children's attendance at their registered schools.

In 2016, the Yuukari Kyoshitsu participated in the Special Monday Course for the first time. One problem faced by its pupils is the lack of encounters and engagement with different people that are usually afforded by ordinary school life. Ms. Takako Sugiura, a teacher at Yuukari Kyoshitsu, decided to participate in the Special Monday Course, hoping that it would help to alleviate the children's situation.

However, there were many obstacles to the visit, one of which was budget. Since Yuukari Kyoshitsu is a municipal scheme, it is not as well funded as facilities financed by the prefectural government. Ms. Sugiura was also hesitant to collect travel expenses from the pupils, as this would pose a financial burden on their families and cause accounting complications when it came to the administrative paperwork.

Safety was another concern. If the children were to use public transport, then Yuukari Kyoshitsu would have to prepare for all kinds of risks. This would require Ms. Sugiura to explain everything in painstaking detail to her superiors and colleagues, in order to gain their support.

The Special Monday Course is designed to address such concerns, offering free admission and door-to-door transport on its chartered buses.

"I told everyone," laughs Ms. Sugiura, "that it's all free and that the children will be picked up – that was what convinced everyone." According to her, many of the children who attend Yuukari Kyoshitsu are daunted by the prospect of using public transport, which increases the chance of encountering strangers. The chartered bus also solved this issue. "We have many students who can't handle taking trains or being in large groups. They have trouble with crowds. So the Special Monday Course's chartered bus is a real blessing."

Yuukari Kyoshitsu also have to gain the consent of parents and guardians before the children can participate.

"It actually takes a lot of courage," Ms. Sugiura explains, "for the children to tell their parents that they want to participate in an extracurricular activity. I was told that one of the boys just left his Special Monday Course form sitting on his desk for a while. He finally asked his mother, 'Do you want me to go?' She said yes, and so he sent in his form, saying, 'Okay, I'll go then.' He'd kept the form without throwing it away – he was probably trying to make up his mind. Maybe he just wanted his mother's encouragement." It is not that such children do not want to go, but that going requires courage.

"Really, they just want to go somewhere. With friends. They wish they could go on school outings like picnics and field trips. But they lack the confidence, worrying that they

might not be able to communicate well with others, for example."

Ms. Sugiura gleefully shows us what her pupils wrote afterwards about the day's experience. Among them was a comment: "It was all glowing inside the bus."

"On the bus," she recalls, "I saw the children laughing loudly for the first time – almost too loudly! Normally, these are shy kids… But they told me that they really enjoyed their day."

The museum may have been an ideal destination for the children, as no-one would bother them there even if they just daydreamed by themselves. The exhibition is closed to the public during the Special Monday Course, so they are the only ones in the gallery; they do not have to worry about being judged. It is this sense of security that motivates the children to participate in the program.

In November 2016, Yuukari Kyoshitsu's children visited the *Van Gogh and Gauguin: Reality and Imagination* exhibition, which centered on the two artists' life together in Arles in the south of France. The exhibition explored the development of the artists' works and their relationship, tracing their artistic careers before this chapter of their lives, and examining its impact on their later lives and works.

"The exhibition gave us an insight into the interactions and friendship between Van Gogh and Gauguin," says Ms. Sugiura. "That's really about *how they lived their lives.* Technical details, like the artists' painting techniques, might not resonate with kids with little interest in arts and crafts. But how they lived – that's relevant to every child. I think it was an extremely valuable learning experience."


The Tobira greeting the students

<u>Reticent children learning to open up</u>

For the Special Monday Course, the children and Tobira viewed the artworks in small groups, so that they could engage properly with each other and with the exhibits. Each group was composed of two or three children from Yuukari Kyoshitsu and two Tobira, and they went around the gallery together, joined by Ms. Sugiura from time to time. She happened to come across the boy described earlier, who had had trouble deciding whether or not to attend.

"There was a painting by Gauguin," Ms. Sugiura recalls, "that showed three people standing next to each other, with one of them – the man – with his back to the viewer. Well, the boy noticed that the man in the painting was slouching a little. He was the only one who noticed – I didn't see it either. He'd say things like 'I wonder why he's facing the other way' and 'The women's heads are raised, but the man is stooping. Maybe this is an island where the women are strong.' It was remarkable!"

The other children too could be seen starting to communicate with each other and engage with the paintings. Ms. Sugiura says, “I was really surprised. These are kids who are normally hesitant to speak, who have trouble speaking up.”

The Tobira undoubtedly played a significant part. Ms. Sugiura feels that her position as a teacher can sometimes be a source of pressure for the children. The Tobira are neither teachers nor parents; they are grown-ups whom the children would not see in their everyday life, but who will nevertheless stand by their side. This, perhaps, makes it easy for the children to talk to them.

Sometimes, before and after the Special Monday Course, the children and Tobira exchange letters. Ms. Sugiura told us that the children were delighted that the Tobira had sent each of them a letter. Meanwhile, the letters that the Tobira received from the children were filled with words of gratitude and satisfaction about the museum experience.

Many children who attend Yuukari Kyoshitsu are diffident about communicating with others, actively avoiding social interaction. Some are even distrustful of adults.

Ms. Sugiura comments, “But if the children can realize that there are kind, wonderful adults, and gain even a little bit more confidence about communicating with others, then that would be a huge step forward.”


Chatting at the *Van Gogh and Gauguin* exhibition

Giving the children a reason to go out

Ms. Sugiura had found out about the Special Monday Course initiative through participating in the Tobi’s “Teachers’ Day.” On these days, the teachers are first introduced to the wealth of past programs organized for schools, thus gaining an idea of the exciting time that the museum offers. Sometimes, they are invited to experience an art-viewing workshop firsthand.

Ms. Sugiura decided to apply for the Special Monday Course straight after participating in Teachers’ Day. The biggest reason was that she wanted to give the children of Yuukari Kyoshitsu a chance to venture outside. There are museums of all kinds in Ueno, and the Special Monday Course also offers a chance to introduce these institutions to the children. After all, there may be children who do not have much interest in art, but who would visit a science museum or a history museum. If, after participating in a Special Monday Course, some of these children actively decide to visit Ueno Park in their spare time, this would be an important step in their growth.

“I wanted to show them that the outside world is full of exciting things, and that there’s

a lot that they can enjoy on their own – to encourage them to leave their house and explore the outside world. If they like science, they could visit the National Museum of Nature and Science. If they like history, they could visit the Tokyo National Museum. There are concerts going on in the Tokyo Bunka Kaikan. They could even just have fun in the woods in Ueno Park. I just wanted to let them know that there are many places in the outside world where they would be welcome."

In fact, one of the Special Monday Course participants actually returned to the *Van Gogh and Gauguin* exhibition at a later date with his mother in tow.

"Apparently, he was even explaining the exhibits to his mother – I almost cried when I heard that. That's exactly the sort of thing I was hoping for," says Ms. Sugiura.

The Special Monday Course listens to the schools' needs and customizes its program, as with the free chartered bus. The program fosters learning through encouraging equal communication between adults and children, rather than through imparting knowledge. This is the basic approach of every Museum Start iUeno program. Because the Tobira – adults whom the children do not see daily – are there to accompany them and listen to them, the children can gain more confidence in their own perspectives and communication skills. The Special Monday Course will continue to devise diverse schemes that are accessible for schools, in order to provide memorable art-viewing experiences even to children with few opportunities to visit art museums.

Talking while viewing artwork with the Tobira

Building a system of collaboration between children and adults

Sawako Inaniwa

Observing and appreciating art through dialogue

A key characteristic of Museum Start iUeno's programs is that they are based around the process of observing and appreciating art through dialogue. They are designed through a collaboration of university teaching staff, museum curators, and the art communicators – the Tobira – who accompany the children as they view the art. This is all the more reason why the Tobira's power to listen and accompany are critical. To look at an example of how these programs operate, we organize art-viewing programs for around twenty schools every year, showing whole classes or grades around the galleries in the Tobi and around Geidai's University Art Museum. There are two types of these programs – the "Special Monday Course," for which we open the exhibition room on a Monday, when it is usually closed; and the "UENO Welcome Course," held on other days of the week. Both come in three phases: 1) a preliminary lesson at school, 2) the program at the museum, and 3) a review lesson at a later date.

We typically start preparing for the programs by inviting teachers from the schools in question to see the actual exhibition. After this, the museum staff and the teachers go about discussing the content of the whole program. It is the teachers who give the preliminary lesson at the schools, for which the museum lends out some teaching materials. These include A4-sized cardboard prints of the exhibited artworks and the "Art-Viewing Box" that contains a self-guide leaflet for children.

The purpose of the preliminary lesson is to inspire in the children an active attitude of wanting to go to the museum to see the art with their own eyes, instead of a passive one of merely being taken to the museum. The reason is that the children can only acquire in-depth learning by approaching the activity with a positive, independent outlook.

The children's psychological state on the day, therefore, is a crucial factor. As such, it is essential that we try to motivate them at the school prior to the visit. With this aim in mind, the teachers and the project staff discuss everything thoroughly in advance, making sure that there is a shared understanding of the program's purpose and objectives, as well as a relationship of trust.

On the actual day of the art-viewing program at the museum, the children split up into small groups and view the artworks together. They are accompanied by the Tobira, whose role is to maintain an atmosphere that encourages dialogue. Whether the grown-ups and children can communicate in an enriching way at the museum depends on the combination of motivating the children in advance, and the ability of the accompanying Tobira on the day.

The visit lasts around two hours, divided between viewing artworks while communicating as a group, and viewing them individually in a more reflective mode. For the

review lesson held at a later date, most schools have the children draw up a summary of their experience at the museum in the Adventure Notebook, which is included in the Museum Starter Pack.


Writing in Adventure Notebooks

The museum as “a third place”

Museum Start iUeno is not over once you have participated in one of its programs. Rather, involvement in the museum-based community only starts on the day that you first take part. The project’s mission is to create a community held together by “museum ties,” an alternative to the more established forms of community founded on local or familial ties, ties from workplaces, schools and so on. This is a community based in a public space – namely the museum – and mediated by cultural resources, which are a public commons.

But it is easy for both adults and children to miss the opportunity to go to the museum in their busy everyday lives. That is where iUeno’s community-building framework comes into play.

Anyone can register to become a Museum Start iUeno Member after participating once. Members will then receive the “iUeno News” by e-mail four times a year, which contains appealing information about each of Ueno’s cultural institutions. In the summer, for example, iUeno News informs members about Kids Day, when exhibitions are open only to children and their accompanying adults. Members are also invited three times a year to the members-only “iUeno Special” days, which allow members and Tobira to meet each other again at the museum.

On iUeno Special days, the children visit the Tobi and check in at the Art Study Room – the program’s headquarters – carrying their Museum Starter Packs over their shoulders. There, they first browse information about the nine cultural institutions, then make their way to their museum of choice. After viewing the exhibits, they return to the Art Study Room, where they open their Adventure Notebooks and record the discoveries they made from seeing artworks and artifacts. Tobira are present in the Art Study Room to oversee the children as they fill in their Adventure Notebooks, and upload completed entries to the dedicated web page.

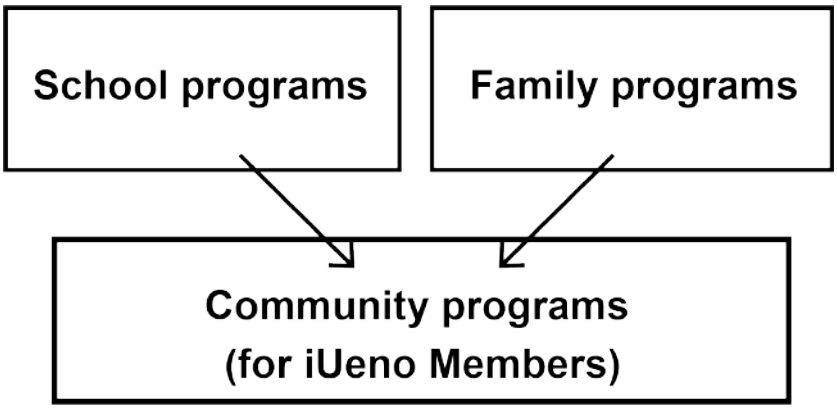
There are also drop-in workshops on themes relevant to the exhibition, and a shelf of stationery available if anyone wants to do a bit of craftwork. The participants can meet and befriend their fellow members, free to spend the day however they like.

These iUeno Special days, which are held three times a year, rouse the children’s

motivation to visit the museum over and over.

It has been five years since we launched iUeno. Today, there are many families who developed a taste for the museum experience after making their “museum debut” through iUeno, and who now make a habit of visiting museums in and outside Ueno Park. There are even a few high school students who had participated in an iUeno program years before, decided that they wanted to be like the Tobira they had met on it, and realized that goal after reaching the age of eighteen. These are precisely examples of museum ties mediated by cultural resources and public spaces.

Our vision is of “a third place,” which is neither one’s home nor one’s place of work or education. Ueno Park is becoming like a living room that is open to all, and its museum-based community that spawns new ideas and connects diverse people is slowly spreading beyond the park.



Joining either a school program or a family program entitles participants to a Museum Starter Pack. Those who sign up as iUeno members receive invitations to the “iUeno Special” community programs.

Feature web page on “Gento the iUeno Ambassador” and his activities at the museum

Designing programs that bridge the education gap

Museum Start iUeno has two central pillars: school programs and family programs. Running programs targeted at schools is a must if we are to create opportunities for children in as broad and fair a manner as possible. On the other hand, if we wish to transform cultural

facilities into places of learning, then creating learning opportunities for families is no less important.

Though the “Wonderful Discoveries in Ueno” series is the most popular of the family programs, it is not without its challenges. For example, the number of applications for “Art & Animals Club,” which is jointly run by the Tobi and Ueno Zoological Gardens, exceeds the number of available places by over ten times every year. Particularly with these programs that attract a lot of interest, the parents and guardians who apply tend already to be heavy users of cultural institutions. As such, these numbers are not an evidence that our programs are successfully appealing to a broad spectrum of families.

Another set of family programs, the “Museum Trip,” is aimed at social inclusion. We hold programs for children in institutional homes, programs for children from families with financial difficulties, and for children of foreign origin whose families face problems regarding money or cultural integration.

To take the last of these categories as an example, Tokyo is an enormous city inhabited by many children with overseas roots. There are a growing number of children who do not have a grasp of the Japanese language despite being Japanese nationals, and who are facing problems in their everyday lives for this reason. The Museum Trip is an attempt to explore, together with the Tobira, what museums can do to remedy such a situation.

Museums in multicultural cities are places that can serve to champion cultural diversity, which can cultivate both an understanding of one’s own culture and empathy towards others. It was this notion that convinced us that Ueno Park was an ideal setting for programs aimed at children of foreign origin, given its wide array of museums.

Our biggest challenge is to create an effective communication network through which to inform the children in question about our programs, arouse their curiosity, and make the museums physically and mentally accessible to them. This necessitates that we find a way to reach these children and their guardians; we must also get in touch with NPOs that support such children, conveying to them the project’s mission and establishing the trust necessary for a collaboration. It is only through painstaking preparation that we can interest the children in Ueno’s museums and convince them to pay the park a visit.

Another aim of Museum Start iUeno’s activities is to foster “citizenship learning.” By encountering artworks and cultural artifacts at the museum while communicating with adults, the children may develop a positive attitude toward civic participation, learning to engage actively with the society and culture to which they belong. If we were to sum up the project’s key components, they would the following:

1. Capitalizing on the wealth of cultural resources through the collaboration of multiple cultural institutions
2. Collaborating with a wide range of adults from specialists to members of the public
3. Developing tools (e.g. the Museum Starter Pack)

4. Addressing educational and cultural inequality through a publicly financed initiative
5. Establishing a cycle that forms a museum-based community

As it stands, the two essential resources for Museum Start iUeno are its diverse cultural resources and civic collaboration. Tools such as the Museum Starter Pack, which encourage participants to visit multiple museums, are there to maximize these resources. In terms of the individual programs that rest on this foundation, we take care to follow up on them diligently, maintaining close contact with the NPOs, schools and other organizations in order to update the programs' contents as needed. Such administrative activities allow us to develop this cycle, so that children may keep returning to Ueno's museums.

The Museum Trip welcome card

Case 6: “Museum Trips” connecting people from different backgrounds

Text: Takako Ijiri

What are Museum Trips?

One day in July, six high school students participated in a Museum Trip organized by Museum Start iUeno. Though they were then attending different high schools, all were former students of Tabunka Free School, an NPO Multicultural Center Tokyo initiative geared toward preparing students from foreign backgrounds for high school in Japan.

It had in fact taken a month to assemble these participants through the partner NPO: it had proved difficult to reach the high school students that the program was targeting. One might see this as an indication of how far removed these students were from the world of art. The NPO staff advised that a social messaging app would be the most reliable method of contact. This was also used to send invitations, via the NPO, from the Tobira to the participants.

The meeting point for the day of the Museum Trip was Bukichi Inoue’s *my sky hole 85-2 light and shadow* near the Tobi’s main gate, a shining silver outdoor sculpture resembling a giant pinball. The Tobira and the participants were meeting for the first time, though they had exchanged messages in advance on the LINE messaging app – accounting, perhaps, for the curious lack of nervousness.

For this Museum Trip, the group was split up into pairs, each composed of a Tobira and a high school student. After exchanging greetings, they moved to the Art Study Room in the museum, where the pairs sat down together, two pairs per table. The exhibition to be seen that day was *Great Collectors: Masterpieces from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*, which was then on view at the Tobi. They began by looking at “Art Cards” and selecting artworks they liked. Then it was off to the exhibition space, where they took time viewing the artworks as a group before going off in pairs with the Tobira in search of the artwork from their chosen Art Card. After the exhibition, the Tobira and participants returned to the Art Study Room and began the “Colorful Chips” workshop, which was comprised of the following five steps:

1. Revisit the artwork on the Art Cards.
2. Pick three colors from the artwork, and mix different paints together to recreate them.
3. Paint each color onto a white chip to create three Colorful Chips.
4. Cut the chips in half, one to keep and one to give to the partner.
5. Exchange these halves with the partner, so that everyone has Colorful Chips in six colors.

Then the participants stuck the Colorful Chips and their chosen artwork onto their Adventure Notebooks and recorded their memories of the day. The program ended with a group lunch.

Any organization can apply to team up with Museum Start iUeno for a Museum Trip; but sometimes, it is iUeno that reaches out to the organization, as was the case with Multicultural Center Tokyo.

Multicultural Center Tokyo's vision is of a society that respects differences of nationality, language, and culture. To this end, the organization engages in initiatives that seek to resolve issues faced by children of foreign origin. Its particular focus is on efforts to guarantee these children access to education, with Tabunka Free School being their core project.

The school has two locations, one each in Arakawa and Suginami Wards. It is aimed at students who have finished their compulsory education or who attended junior high school in their home countries, mainly helping them study Japanese and other subjects with a view to their high school entrance examinations. Including those who participate only for the summer intensives, the school works with about ninety students annually.

"I heard about the Museum Trips," says Ms. Yukimi Wang, an administrative staff member at Multicultural Center Tokyo, "and really wanted to make it happen. We looked into it as an organization, and decided to start with an event for Tabunka Free School alumni."


Setting off on the Museum Trip


Working with Art Cards


Making the Colorful Chips with the Tobira

Eliminating concerns through painstaking discussions

Normally, implementing a project of this kind brings up three major issues to begin with: safe transport, budget, and content. At Multicultural Center Tokyo too, discussions on the project's viability focused on these three points.

First, the issue of transportation. "One significant factor," says Ms. Wang, "was that we didn't have to worry about shepherding the students everywhere, seeing as the participants were alumni." With current students, the staff would have had to take them from the school to the museum. The alumni, however, were already in high school and accustomed to life in Japan, so meeting at the museum did not present a problem.

Next, there was budget. "Participation was free – in fact, some of the alumni agreed to come because of that. Going to art museums isn't cheap, so for students who work part-time jobs to support themselves or pay for school, it was a decisive factor that it wouldn't cost them anything."

The NPOs are commissioned by Geidai to handle the administrative aspects of coordinating the programs. For the NPO staff, these programs entail tasks that differ from their everyday duties, such as holding meetings with the museum, inviting participants, and so on. These considerations – paying the partner organizations so as to cover the estimated expenses, all the while accounting for their respective circumstances and management needs – are what make the Museum Trips possible.

"Even if the program itself is great and everyone's on board, budget is always an issue for NPOs like us. You can't organize events like this without outside fundraising. But if we don't have to worry about that, then the rest comes more easily."

Museum Start iUeno's program officer Ms. Yuko Watanabe (30) recalls: "For our first meeting, we invited Ms. Wang to the museum and offered her an explanation of the program. For the next meeting, our staff visited the Tabunka Free School and were shown what its classrooms and students were like, then we worked together to determine what sort of program would be appropriate."

During the meetings, they exchanged ideas and discussed their concerns frankly. "Most of the current high schoolers who attended Tabunka Free School have been in Japan for one to three years," explains Ms. Watanabe. "So we thought a dialogue-based art appreciation program would be perfect, as it would also mean a chance to converse in Japanese with adults they wouldn't normally meet. Ms. Wang suggested that it might be good to include some nonverbal creative activity too, so we added a color-themed exercise to the program, thinking this would make it easier for people from different cultural backgrounds to communicate. Finally, we wanted to give participants the opportunity to mingle and really get to know each other – which led us to the idea of ending the workshop by exchanging the Colorful Chips."

Museum Start iUeno prepares all its programs with the Tobira prior to meeting the children. For this Museum Trip, iUeno learned from the partner organization details such as how long each participant had lived in Japan, and shared the information with the Tobira in advance. According to Ms. Watanabe, this is so that, “by knowing the background of each student, we can think about how to provide for them and prepare.” Sometimes iUeno will hold study sessions on social issues affecting the children; sometimes the partner organization will give a lecture. “But prior information is, at the end of the day, only information. Our greatest emphasis is on observing and adjusting to the children we meet on the actual program.”

Scrupulous attention was paid to how the team should receive the guests. For example, if the Tobira’s first contact with participants had been on the day of the event, they may have found it difficult to chat with each other, even if paired off one on one. The Tobira accordingly wrote letters to their partner students in advance. “We sent scans of their letters to Ms. Wang,” says Ms. Watanabe, “and she sent them to each of the participants on the LINE app.”

The Tobira also sent messages to the high schoolers a few months after the program, recalling the time spent at the art museum and concluding: “Let’s meet at the museum again!” It is easier for people to feel connected to places where they are remembered. These thoughtful interactions with the participants are a key aspect of the Museum Trips. “The program supports the participants warmly from start to finish,” says Ms. Wang, “starting with their letters at the start. They even sent out letters after the program. For the alumni, who were joining an event like this for the first time, I think it heightened their anticipation and made them feel glad they participated.”

Ms. Wang explains why the event targeted alumni, rather than current students, as follows: “Right now, our organization is fully focused on helping the kids in our classrooms to continue their education to high school. This makes it tricky to follow up with them after they start high school; we also have very few opportunities to check in with alumni. To remedy this, we’d just made a group thread on the LINE app to get back in touch with our alumni, when we heard from the iUeno staff. We realized this would give us a great reason to contact them. It was such a timely offer.”

With support from a variety of companies, Multicultural Center Tokyo had held career-focused events for current and former students. An art-focused event for alumni, however, was a first. No one could predict if anyone would participate, or what their reactions would be. So, rather than just recruit participants by posting on the LINE group chat, they also personally contacted alumni through teachers who had kept in touch with them.

On the day, one student had finished work at his part-time job at 3 a.m; as a result, he overslept and arrived late. Once he entered the exhibition space, however, he lingered persistently in front of the artwork that grabbed his interest. After the program finished, he left in a flash, saying, “Sorry, have to go pick up some materials

for English class!" Students are busy, so it means a lot that they chose to spare time in their packed schedules for this event. Ms. Wang says, "Coming into contact with art and culture is so important. A program of this kind allows us to see sides of the students that we've never seen in the classroom. We discovered all kinds of things – kids we thought were quiet happily chatting away with the Tobira, kids who turned out to have an amazing knack for art, and so on."

Ms. Yiran Zhang, a Tabunka Free School alumna, spoke about the day: "It was really great to talk to grown-ups in Japanese. And seeing all the artwork – I was just amazed by the art."

During the program, participants were able to talk with the Tobira about all kinds of topics unrelated to art, from their ages to their favorite foods. Ms. Sayuki Shiraishi (20), a college student, was the Tobira paired with Ms. Zhang. They were put in a pair because of their similar age, which often makes it easier for participants to talk to each other. The other pairs were also put together taking account of their ages, backgrounds and such. This is another of the Museum Trip's tactics that seek to ensure that each Tobira can engage properly with the participants.

This personalized, participant-focused program design has been well-received by iUeno's partner organizations. Feedback thus far has included comments such as "The one-on-one set-up made the event into a special time between the students and their grown-up partners. I think the participants found this reassuring" and "I think they felt welcomed and accepted by the Tobira."

Ms. Zhang commented, "I don't often talk to adults outside my family, or people other than my friends at school. This gave me the chance to have conversations with ordinary Japanese people. I also got into the art in the process, but that's why the Museum Trip is a wonderful memory for me."

The language used at art museums is difficult for children whose native language is not Japanese: it is full of words that do not come up in their daily lives, that deal with elusive and imprecise sensations. The Tobira, therefore, make sure to speak as simply and clearly as possible. Such communication can also lead to encounters with new words that fit one's feelings like a glove.

One word Ms. Zhang learned at the event was *daitan*, "bold." One of the paintings she saw with the Tobira featured an intense shade of pink, and she encountered this word as she tried to communicate this. Laughing cheerily, she told us, "The painting used this distinctive pink for grass, plants, things like that. I learned from the Tobira that I could call this use of color *daitan*."

 Multicultural Center Tokyo

 Lunch with the Tobira

A rare chance to meet new adults

“I think these opportunities let you meet people from communities you normally don’t have any contact with,” says Ms. Wang. “That was certainly the case for the students, and it was for us as well, as a non-profit. Speaking personally, I found it really stimulating to get out of the office with the kids and meet people from different walks of life.”

The “Tobira” label covers people from all kinds of backgrounds. “It also gives participants a chance to see different ways of living, different possibilities for their own futures. For example, going to university and working for a big company is not necessarily the right answer – and I’m pretty sure children with foreign backgrounds are under a lot of pressure to follow that path too. I’d like them to know that there are also adults out there working in the arts. When I was a high school student, I didn’t have the opportunity to meet a lot of different adults. I want the kids who have moved on from the Free School to meet all kinds of people and carve out their own lives.”

Beyond the Museum Trip: showing consideration, building connections

According to Museum Start iUeno’s program officer Ms. Watanabe, “The real core of the program is not seeing the artwork, but the whole *experience* of seeing the artwork.” The memory of the whole experience remains with the participants: making a special trip out, seeing the artwork, going home, recalling everything that happened. And these memories lead children to the next step toward their futures. Later, Ms. Zhang also participated in an “iUeno Special” event, which is aimed toward children and guardians who have previously joined an iUeno program.

The Tobira and the children all have diverse backgrounds, but the artworks put

them on an even playing field. Alongside the Tobira, who are neither their parents nor their teachers, the students engage in deep conversation inspired by art and cultural artifacts. This process can boost their sense of self-worth and give them opportunities to involve themselves in society at large.

“I’m sure there are some organizations that can’t afford to spend much time on preparations – the administrative work, meetings and so on. But these programs are an invaluable opportunity for the children, so we’d recommend them to other organizations,” Ms. Wang insists. iUeno operates under the philosophy of “A museum experience for every child.” This is precisely what allows it to meticulously prepare programs that are specially tailored to the children’s needs and backgrounds.

For Ms. Watanabe, “Another valuable thing that the management team gains through this program is the relationships with organizations outside the museum, like Multicultural Center Tokyo. They’re involved with children who slip through the cracks that social policies fail to fill, and from a standpoint different to our own. It’s a program we can all learn a lot from – both we staff members and the Tobira too.”

Social inclusion comes in many forms: society faces different issues, and there remain a large number of people with limited opportunities to encounter art and culture. All the trials and errors of the Museum Trip initiative, which offers made-to-order art appreciation programs, add to the museum’s experience and lead to yet new undertakings.

At the same time, this experience of working with diverse people and organizations will aid the art communicators – the Tobira – as they finish their time at the Tobira Project and go on to create new values in society through art, each in their own capacity. The adventures of the Tobira, which bring art and people together in society, only begin here.

Past program participants gather for “iUeno Special”

Column: “Where the Tobira Project is headed”
Katsuhiko Hibino

Katsuhiko Hibino is an artist who was born in Gifu in 1958. He earned his master’s degree in 1984 from the Graduate School of Fine Arts at Tokyo University of the Arts. He has exhibited his work in the Japan Pavilion at the 46th Venice Biennale in 1995, and his accolades include the 2015 Minister of Education Award for Fine Arts for contribution to the promotion of the arts. He currently serves as the dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts at the Tokyo University of the Arts, where he also teaches Intermedia Art. He is the chief representative of Tokyo University of the Arts in the Tobira Project.

My introduction to the Art Communication Programs

My involvement with the Tobira Project began while the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum was undergoing a renovation, and planning to launch its Art Communication Programs upon its re-opening. I believe I was approached because my practice as an artist centered on workshops and social art projects. As I was also teaching at the Tokyo University of Arts (Geidai), they asked me if a collaboration between the two institutions would be possible. So we set to shaping the structure of the Tobira Project, working in close communication with the Public Collaboration Center, a division that had just been installed at Geidai. In that sense, the project did not start off as a collaborative scheme between Geidai and the Tobi; it became what it is today through connections between individuals.

Installing a workshop room at the museum

The discussions soon came to the topic of what “Art Communication Programs” should even aim to do, and one of my first suggestions was to install a permanent workshop center inside the Tobi. I had started to take my practice outside the confines of the museum in the 1980s, feeling that the whole system of exhibiting works at museums was an overly academic and constraining an approach to art.

At the time, museums located inside department stores, such as the Seibu Museum of Art and the Isetan Museum of Art, had become the earliest to incorporate art that responded to the times. It was a stimulating time when cities, museums, fashion, street culture and other subcultures – all these things were blending into one another. This was

accompanied by an explosion of artworks that involved not just viewing objects but engaging with other people. Amid that trend, the term “workshop” also gradually gained currency. With a workshop format, one creates artworks and activities through engaging with other people, rather than through shutting oneself up in an atelier. As such, I thought it was a great fit for the Art Communication Programs.

Features of the Tobira Project, such as the “Gather Round” system and the Tobi-Labo, are workshops too in the sense that their activities are shaped through discussions between everyone involved. Moreover, the project’s workshops are not supervised by one artist: they are planned and managed by all the Tobira around. That is the crux of the Tobira Project.

The origin of the name “Tobira”

It was not until a while later that the initiative came to be called the Tobira Project. Students at Geidai have always referred to the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum as the “Tobikan.” But in Japan’s museum industry, it is more commonly known as “Tobi,” so I was confused when I first heard the word, thinking to myself, “What? Who’s Toby?” The word “Tobi” left a particular impression on me. Then we added “-ra” to give it the sense of “people who support the Tobi.” This is a Japanese suffix that is often used to indicate members of a particular group, like the so-called “Amura” – fans of the singer Namie Amuro – who was very popular at the time. So we settled on “Tobira,” as this would also play nicely on the word *tobira* [written differently in Japanese], meaning “doorway.” The museum’s new logo, which was designed by Tokujin Yoshioka, was a cube, so we decided to add a door to that. That’s how we arrived at the name and came to call the whole initiative the “Tobira Project.” There is a lot in a name: once the project had a name, it did not take long for its outline to take shape.

The art communicators of Ueno

At the start, the Tobira Project was still groping its way forward. A significant step came the following year in the form of Museum Start iUeno, which was a collaboration between Ueno’s cultural institutions, including the Tobi and Geidai. This is a team effort between nine institutions in Ueno, in addition to which there are art communicators – the Tobira – who participate proactively. If our activities had been limited to the Tobi and Geidai, I think we would have struggled to provide experiences that people could apply in the real world.

Another milestone was the formation of Art Communicator Tokyo, a voluntary group set up by members of the inaugural batch of Tobira upon reaching the end of their term. These people had determined to remain socially engaged, setting up a proper organization and applying for funding themselves – not just run activities within the Tobira Project’s framework,

in which they are provided a room and funding.

When we set up the Tobira Project six years ago, did we know where it would be in six years' time? Perhaps not. But we had envisaged that, with two years to go until the Tokyo Olympics, there would be cultural programs going all over the city, and that there would be a place for a lot of art communicators. Since then, we have seen the launch of initiatives such as Geidai's DOOR program,[5] and later, Ueno Cultural Park.[6] I feel that the need for such programs – programs that connect cultural resources, people and local areas – is at an all-time high, higher than we could have imagined six years ago.

A society that sets value on art communication

That is where the art communicators come into play. It needs to become more commonplace for them, who have trained the skill to look at things through art, to be active in society. At the same time, we need to work to structure society in such a way that allows these professional art communicators to do productive work. For example, they might go to a facility for the elderly and engage with the wonderful old folks who feel cooped up in there – try to help them live their lives happily in comfort, with a positive attitude. If we can demonstrate how these initiatives contribute to society, then we can set value on them and recompense their members. For that to happen, we also need people who can sense what society needs right now, propose solutions to local governments, and secure the necessary funding.

The value of dialogue-based art appreciation

I think that the role of the art museum will also undergo a shift. It was my experiences with the

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[5] "The Diversity on the Arts Project" (DOOR Project) is a certification program that the Tokyo University of the Arts has been running since 2017. The goal of this project is to connect art and social welfare, cultivating human resources who can contribute toward a harmonious society of diverse people. Its courses, which are open to both Geidai students and adults unaffiliated with the university, include lectures by experts on the current state of social welfare, and practical seminars on artistic practice that centers on communication.
http://door.geidai.ac.jp

[6] Ueno Cultural Park was conceived as part of the "New Concept 'Ueno, a Global Capital of Culture'" scheme with a view to the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics. By linking together the cultural institutions in Ueno Park, as well as the Ueno district at large, the initiative aims to turn Ueno Park into a global hub for art and culture that promotes diverse values.
http://ueno-bunka.jp/about/ueno-bunka/

Tobira Project that led me to start the “Nanyarone” program at the Museum of Fine Arts, Gifu, where I currently serve as director.[7] Nanyarone too is what we call a “dialogue-based art appreciation” program. Rather than start with contextual information like the year of an artwork’s creation, we encourage people to approach art from an attitude of *nanyarone*, meaning “So what d’you reckon this is?” The Museum of Fine Arts, Gifu also runs a project called “Such Such Such.” This was heavily based on the *Kubbe Makes an Art Museum* exhibition at the Tobi,[8] another product of its Art Communication Programs. In Such Such Such, viewers go around seeing the artworks while filling a box with objects that express feelings they cannot verbalize – that, for example, somehow represent what they feel when they see a particular work. The boxes are then exhibited at the end.

As with other museums, the Museum of Fine Arts, Gifu has separate curatorial teams for planning educational activities and exhibitions. But these two teams had never worked as closely together on a project as they have on Nanyarone and Such Such Such.

What makes the Tobi’s Art Communication Programs unique is that they operate in parallel with the curators who organize the exhibitions, working in close collaboration. This is unlike the conventional, asymmetrical model in which exhibitions are set as the museum’s core activity; in such a model, the art communication staff is only there to supplement this core activity by running art-viewing programs and covering other educational aspects. I hope that this new model of museum operation will go on to spread across the whole country.

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[7] The Nanyarone Project is an initiative run by the Museum of Fine Arts, Gifu. “Nanyarone” is a phrase that means “So what d’you reckon this is?” in the local dialect: the idea is that viewers should, when engaging with an artwork, start by asking themselves that simple question. Its various activities include exhibitions, workshops, and art-viewing programs.
http://www.kenbi.pref.gifu.lg.jp/page5381.php

[8] *Kubbe Makes an Art Museum – by seeing, gathering, studying and exhibiting* was held from July 18 to October 4, 2015. The exhibition included participatory artworks, and incorporated the principles of the newly reopened Tobi’s Art Communication Programs.
http://kubbe.tobikan.jp/index.html

Tobira Interview: “Something I might be able to do too”

Sakura Kajiura (Tobira 2017–2020)

Born in 1998. Sakura Kajiura is a student at Tokyo Zokei University. She joined the Tobira Project in 2017 – one of the sixth cohort of Tobira – where she helps run the “Go with the Tobira Board!” program among others.

I went to a high school that specialized in design, and visited the Tobi to see the *Kubbe Makes an Art Museum* exhibition as an out-of-school curricular activity. I mainly decided to go because it was an easy way to get course credit – that’s all it really was. I knew nothing about Kubbe, and when I found out that he was a character from a series of children’s books, I thought that the exhibition must be for little kids too. It so happened that my younger sister, who was at elementary school, was being taken to the same exhibition on a school trip that morning. I remember feeling a little glum at the thought of her drawing unnecessary attention by telling everyone that her big sister was there too.

As I was looking at the exhibits in the venue, there was someone who kept coming up to me and talking to me. That was my first encounter with a Tobira. The explanation itself was detailed and interesting, but I was secretly apprehensive, because I suspected that all these explanations meant that there would be some test or homework on the exhibition back at school.

I moved on to the room where *Bigdatana – tana wa mono no sumika* was on display, and tried my hand at making my own specimen box. But even there, I was hesitant to make a real effort, worrying that if I ended up making something half-decent, they might decide to put it up on the website or something. So I intentionally put together a collection that consisted only of lids and caps, but to my surprise, all the Tobira were very complimentary about the finished collection. It was a peculiar feeling, and I remember thinking, “I’m free to do anything here.”

Later on, I was in my last year at high school and was considering applying to an art college. There was an art college near my house, and all the students there had always seemed very trendy and fun.

It was around that time that I came across a flyer at my school about applications to become a Tobira. I’d long forgotten about the Kubbe exhibition, but reading the flyer brought it all back to me. For some reason, I’d always had an image of people who worked at museums as really super people, who’d gone to good universities and knew a lot about everything. I thought the Tobira who’d looked after me at the Kubbe exhibition were like that too.

But reading the flyer, I felt that this was something I might be able to do too. So, as soon as I had passed the entrance exam for the art college, I spent a day writing my

statement and filling in my application form, and sent them off by express mail. At the interviews, everyone around me seemed to have real motivation and clear goals, and I felt a little out of my depth. I must have looked nervous. I'd thought that there was no way I'd get in, so I was both surprised and happy to learn that I'd been accepted.

Currently, I am running the "Go with the Tobira Board!" Tobi-Labo. The Tobira all leave the project after three years, so the Tobi-Labo programs need to be passed on to newer Tobira if they're to continue. I am in the second year of my term, but the man who scouted me for the Tobira Board program has already left, so I have a big responsibility.

Right now, I am mainly based in three places: Hachioji, where my university is; Kodaira, where I live; and Ueno, home of the Tobira Project. On top of that, I'm doing some fieldwork by Lake Sagami (Kanagawa Prefecture) and in Tomioka (Fukushima Prefecture), so I feel like I spend half my time on trains – but I'm find it all enjoyable and fulfilling.

Chapter Three
Quality Communication That Opens Doors in Society

Case 7: The Tobira after the Project, Part 1 – As a designer, as a curator

Text: Yoshie Tadaki

Neither home nor workplace, but a “third place”

“With museum work, you end up involved over a long period of time. In particular, designers are involved with the project from start to finish: planning, designing and building the venue, all the way to the handoff. So, back when public facilities like museums and halls were springing up all across Japan, I was constantly flying around the country, going from project to project.”

So speaks Ms. Mari Kameyama (50), whose gentle and unassuming manner of speech masks a certain confidence that comes with many years of experience. After graduating from art college, she joined Nomura, a firm that specializes in designing spaces for museums, exhibitions, commercial facilities and such. As a designer, she currently heads TeamM, a cross-departmental project at Nomura that proposes ways to make spaces hospitable for children and their parents. She told us why she applied to be a Tobira.

“My two kids are two years apart. So I took two maternity leaves, which meant that I was away from the office for about three years in total. When I eventually returned to work, I found it difficult to balance my work and my home. Even though I wanted to do more work, I had less time to spare, and extended business trips weren’t really an option. Given those circumstances, I was always hesitant to come forward and take on new projects. It was a frustrating situation to be in.

She knew she had to remedy the situation – to find ways to be proactive under the circumstances. That was when she came to realize that she actually knew little about what had become of all the museums she had helped design.

“A designer’s job is done once the design has been built. But I realized that I didn’t actually know whether or not visitors were finding the finished product – i.e. the museum – a comfortable environment to be in.”

It was around that time that she learned about the Tobira Project. Her eyes were drawn to the flyer’s invitation to “become a key player at the museum.” By engaging with museums, not in her professional capacity but as a Tobira, she thought she might be able to find ideas and clues that would help her bring museums and users closer together. She decided to apply straightaway.

There was another reason why Ms. Kameyama chose to apply to the Tobira Project, even though she was already busy at work and at home.

“My frustration about not being able to fully commit myself to work was taking its toll at home. So I thought that having a third place, somewhere apart from my workplace and my home, would help me maintain some balance.”

As a measure to consciously separate her professional and private life, she had always used her maiden name at work; but as a Tobira, she decided to use her married name. She consulted her company and received permission to apply to the project as an outside activity, on condition that she would make use of the takeaways from the project in her company work.

Ms. Kameyama’s husband also works for Nomura as a planner. His job is to produce the outline of projects and oversee their execution, working as a team with the designer. Although they had never been on the same project, as her partner he knew her professional capability and passion, as well as her frustrations. As such, he was both understanding and supportive regarding his wife’s wish to join the Tobira Project.

Ms. Kameyama’s hunch that she had much to gain from the project turned out to be correct. The children who participate in the Special Monday Course are of similar ages to her own children. Looking at art and taking part in workshops with them, she learned to see her own children not just as her children, but as members of society too.

“At home, it’s easy to become shortsighted and be too hard on your kids. Through interacting with children from all backgrounds, I slowly learned to look at each child’s individuality more objectively.”

The important question is how to allow people to enjoy artworks through dialogue, while becoming independent and free-thinking viewers. The Art Appreciation Course addresses this question from the perspective of those facilitating the viewing experience. Ms. Kameyama became fascinated by the process of dialogue-based art appreciation and ended up organizing voluntary practice sessions for herself and other fledgling facilitators.

Her experiences with the Tobira Project gave her many ideas for her own work: how to plan the visitor flow; where to allocate the staff for group visits to the museums; how children tend to move around when they are viewing artworks. In other words, she learned how to manage real sites populated by real people, which is different to designing the physical space.


Nomura head office

 Ms. Mari Kameyama working as a Tobira

A shift in the focus of design work

Ms. Kameyama tells us: “My work had always been about designing spaces – interior design, exhibition venues and so on. But I learned how much fun it was to design sites where group activities take place.”

She raised this point with her superior in a personnel appraisal interview at Nomura.

“I told him that I wanted to design *activities* – that this would also help bring out the polished spatial design and furnishing. There was, of course, no such department at the time. But the following year, that section was newly installed as part of the business development department, and I was transferred there all of a sudden. My boss said to me: ‘You won’t have to draw so many plans from now on.’”

Around that time, there was a new project at Nomura aimed at promoting the role of employees returning to work after maternity leave. The idea had been proposed in an in-house competition by a human resources employee, who was herself raising a young child. Composed entirely of new mothers, the team focused on discussing how the company’s schemes could benefit from their perspectives. Members had joined voluntarily from a variety of departments – designers, sales representatives, production staff and so on. That project eventually gave rise to “TeamM,” the new initiative that Ms. Kameyama currently helms.

“It’s just like the Tobira Project’s ‘Gather Round’ system. Someone would venture, ‘Who’s up for this?’ and others would jump on board as they wished. That’s the beauty of a bottom-up approach. If top management had told us, ‘You mothers, form a team and do something,’ then some of us might have felt indignant about getting pigeonholed like that!”

Parents have different stances on how to balance work and parenting, so this wholly voluntary system was the most natural and realistic approach.

Ms. Kameyama’s experience with the Tobira Project aligned with this newly emerging direction at her company. She felt as though things around her were beginning to change.

TeamM’s activities are based around the principle of “spatial solutions to social issues surrounding children and adults.” To date, many of its ideas have been incorporated in establishments around the country. Ms. Kameyama spoke to us about her thinking behind one of these designs, a baby nursing room in a shopping center.

“Imagine a building with a polished atmosphere, like a hotel. If it had a nursing room with bright pink walls decorated with elephants, giraffes and flowers, it would ruin the image of

the rest of the building. You often feel excluded like that when you have a baby with you, because those spaces don't accommodate the grown-ups looking after the babies."

Providing a well-designed nursing room means providing a space for the babies' parents.

"I wanted to give parents a reason to leave their homes – so that they'd be able to say, 'Maybe I'll pop over to that shopping center, it's convenient and it's somewhere nice to take the kids to,'" continues Ms. Kameyama with a laugh. "It comes from my personal experience of feeling very cooped up staying at home with the children."



TeamM's activities

<u>What museums can do for parents with young children</u>

Ms. Kameyama's mission of creating spaces that cater to adults with children has produced concrete results within the Tobira Project too, namely the Tobi-Labo project "Take Your Baby to the Museum," or "BebiMyu" for short. One Tobira is assigned to each parent with a baby, and accompanies them around the museum as a viewing partner, sometimes helping out by pushing the stroller and so on. The project is aimed to help parents, who can sometimes end up feeling alienated because of their childcare duties, to enjoy the museums and feel refreshed.

"You often hear horrific news stories today," Ms. Kameyama explains, "about parents abusing their children. The idea for BebiMyu arose out of the question of how museums could help prevent such situations."

Ms. Kameyama also tells us about the value of launching this project as part of the Tobira Project, rather than as part of her corporate work.

"In day-to-day life, it's not at all uncommon to find yourself unable to reach the other person with your words and thoughts. But even though the Tobira are a diverse group, when they meet up, they are able to communicate and share ideas with each other. The members all think about and approach things in a different way, but they have a common goal – a shared sense of 'We need to do this somehow.'"

The Tobira attend a lecture on "the power of listening" as part of the Principal Sessions. The Tobira Project's approach is to first welcome any and all ideas, then to go about discussing them as a group.

Another advantage is the level of freedom: members only need to attend meetings or events when they can. All the information is shared online, so you can keep track of the

progress even if you are unable to attend the meetings. Ms. Kameyama found this system helpful.

“Though non-profit projects can be difficult to sustain, the advantage is that they can be tackled without being having to put budgets and deadlines first.”

It all grows out of the enthusiasm of the people involved. Such a project offers experiences that cannot be measured in terms of monetary value.

“I want to tackle projects with people that I can share a vision with. I found people like that at the Tobira Project.”

Ms. Kameyama set up the Tobi-Labo alongside her work and her parenting. Though this undeniably kept her busy, she says that she did not find it strenuous because she gained new perspectives through it, as well as kindred spirits she would not have met through work.

BebiMyu is still a popular program today, which always fills up as soon as the event is announced. This is evidence that social projects tackling this question – “what museums can do for adults with young children” – are in more demand than we had expected. No doubt that Ms. Kameyama will continue to thrive as a designer of spaces where people congregate, making the most of the insights that she gained through the Tobira Project.


Take Your Baby to the Museum


Ms. Kameyama presenting her activities at a forum

The Tobira Project DNA and its impact on curatorial projects

The foot of Mount Bandai in Fukushima Prefecture takes on different appearances in different seasons. The Hajimari Art Center sits modestly in this setting, beside the splendid Lake Inawashiro that is thronged by swans in wintertime.

Walking to the museum in the snow and opening its doors, one finds oneself in a warm space lit by soft white light. Its large bare wooden beams, carried from Mount Bandai, are as long as eighteen meters.

Originally built as a sake brewery 130 years ago, the building underwent different uses, including as a sewing factory and a dance hall, then was restored into a museum in June 2014.

Hajimari Art Center is administered by Asaka Aiikuen, a social welfare facility for people with disabilities. It is a museum that houses contemporary art and art brut, especially works created by those who use Asaka Aiikuen's facilities. It holds three or four exhibitions every year; there are no permanent exhibits. Locals gather in the museum's cafe, and the museum also hosts a colorful range of events, from Haji-marché – a market selling local foods and knick-knacks – to workshops and talks related to the exhibitions.

In 2016, Ms. Ai Omasa (27), a member of the first cohort of Tobira, joined this museum as a curator.

The first exhibition that Ms. Omasa curated, *What You Feel and What I Feel May Be Different*, contrasted from ordinary exhibitions in that it offered visitors two different ways of experiencing the art: seeing and touching. Visitors would see all the artworks and turn back after reaching the end of the venue; but this time, they were allowed to touch the exhibits. Roughly half of the exhibited art belonged to art brut, the rest to contemporary art. All the artworks, however, were of the sort that were tempting to touch: objects that rattled, objects that were shaped like breasts, and so on.

According to Ms. Omasa, "Even though I had only been there for half a year – and this was my first professional job to boot – the staff all had faith in the exhibition. They said that it was a new and interesting idea, and that it was a good fit for the Hajimari Art Center."

Visitors remove their shoes and step into the exhibition room with its flooring made of natural wood and large windows in the walls. Being barefoot somehow allows a more intimate viewing of the artworks. There are also doors that open directly onto the garden from the exhibition room. This is a far cry from the usual image of museums with its minimalist and windowless white cubes. The space is perhaps more suited to exhibitions that invite people to enjoy the relaxed ambiance, rather than to focus all their attention on inspecting the art.

"A place where people can meet, connect and have an impact on each other, regardless of their familiarity with art – I think my experience as a Tobira prepared me to create such a setting."

Ms. Omasa recently curated *Takeru Aoki Great Product Fair: Me and Mr. Aoki's Relationship*, which presented the works of Mr. Takeru Aoki, a resident of one of Asaka Aiikuen's facilities. The footage playing in the venue, which captured Mr. Aoki's everyday life, was shot by Ms. Omasa herself, though she herself had little filming experience.

Archiving the works produced through Asaka Aiikuen's creative activities is an important part of Ms. Omasa's work. She and her on-site supporters go through the huge quantity of works and go about selecting and recording pieces to be preserved.

"It's a big responsibility, because to a large extent, it's up to us to decide whether or not a work should survive!"

Though her official title is curator, there is no clear demarcation of duties. Manning the reception and the cafe, producing and selling merchandise, planning and preparing events, looking after the artworks, borrowing or archiving works, designing flyers, installing

the artwork – all these are managed by the few staff members available.

"It's the same as the Tobira Project's 'Everyone Present' approach."

Though she is always busy with duties of all kinds, she feels lucky to be involved with every aspect of running a museum, despite her relatively limited experience.


Hajimari Art Center


Ms. Ai Omasa in front of *Picture of Thing* (2014) by Marie Yamamoto


Your Words, Chihiro Inui, 2017 © Ryoji Shirado

Neither artist nor curator

Ms. Omasa became a Tobira during her third year in the School of Art & Design at the University of Tsukuba. Though an oil painting major, she also took an interest in workshops, and was a member of a student project called Asparagus, whose activities are based at the University of Tsukuba Hospital. Asparagus operates under the concept of using the power of art to "make hospitals more hospitable."

She has particularly fond memories of "Merry Christmas in Hospi-Town," a project that Asparagus staged in the hospital wards over the holiday season. The idea was to look at the hospital as a town – dubbed "Hospi-Town" – which was inhabited by the patients and staff. The project members filled the hospital with festive art, so that everyone there could enjoy the Christmas season in the town. The house-shaped lamps on the windowsill, for example, would naturally spark conversations among the people around. Though set in a hospital, the aim of the project was not to heal people but to bring people together. Ms. Omasa enjoyed curating opportunities where all sorts of people could mingle on an equal footing, create things together, and communicate.

It was around then that Ms. Omasa found a flyer about the Tobira applications at her university library. She was drawn to the idea of organizing art-related workshops in

establishments other than a hospital. What is more, these workshops would be held in museums – the rightful home of art, so to speak.

“I knew I had to do it,” says Ms. Omasa, “not least because I thought the experience would feed back into my activities at the hospital.”

Hungry to take it all in, she signed up for all three of the elective programs in her first year: Art Appreciation Course, Accessibility Course, and Architecture Course. Feeling that she had more to learn from the Accessibility Course, she continued to attend the course even in her second and third years, furthering her understanding of the subject. After gaining some experience through programs like the *Nobi-nobi Yuttari* Inclusive Workshop, which is open to children with and without disabilities, she set up and played a core role in a Tobi-Labo called “knock-knock” in her third year. This initiative involved visiting museums with children who are institutionalized.

While still a Tobira, Ms. Omasa enrolled at the Tokyo University of the Arts as a postgraduate. She had been torn between furthering her pursuit of oil painting on the Western Painting course and specializing in art projects on the Intermedia Art course. After some heart-searching about which path to follow, she ultimately chose the Intermedia Art course. Her graduation project for her master’s degree was an exhibition titled *Art Communicator: A Way to Get Involved*. It dealt with her own involvement in activities to curate experiences and opportunities at the museum, not as a curator or an artist, but as something in between – an art communicator.

“Through the Tobira Project, the museum became for me a place not just for seeing artworks, but also for seeing fellow Tobira, the children who visit for programs like the *Nobi-nobi Yuttari* Inclusive Workshop, and so on. I wanted to put into words the value of such a place where you can meet all kinds of people through art.”

At one point during her postgraduate studies at Geidai, she also worked under Professor Katsuhiko Hibino in his studio at the university. Hibino is an artist who supervises TURN FES, an annual festival held at the Tobi to connect art and social welfare, and Ms. Omasa ended up becoming involved with many art brut exhibitions through him. That was how she became acquainted with people from the Hajimari Art Center, where she would later become a curator.

She tells us, “I feel that all those past experiences – as a university student, and as a Tobira – led me to where I am today.”

“Merry Christmas in Hospi-Town” (photograph courtesy of University of Tsukuba Hospital)

All about who you work with

Many people visit the Hajimari Art Center for reasons other than seeing the exhibitions. Many only come to have tea in the cafe; there is even a local origami virtuoso who always brings along his latest work. During the harsh winters, the museum puts out *kotatsu* (traditional heated tables covered with a blanket) in the cafe, where families are found sitting and relaxing for long periods of time. And Ms. Omasa has often seen people meeting for the first time and hitting it off or establishing new business connections. As Inawashiro is a small town, people of diverse walks of life and personal interests gather in this one place. Her own interest lies in not only organizing exhibitions, but also creating such settings where people of all sorts can gather, meet, feel at home.

When she was a high school student in Ehime Prefecture, one place she loved to frequent was an art supplies store. Whenever she went, she would meet and talk to all sorts of people over some plum kelp tea that the store's owner always served, and learn things that are not taught at school.

During preparations for *Takeru Aoki Great Product Fair*, Ms. Omasa found herself struggling to find ready-made frames that were right for the drawings. So she decided to ask the art supplies store in Ehime to handle the framing. Given that the drawings were to join the museum's archives after the exhibition, there was a chance that they might be loaned out in the future. As such, they had to be framed right.

The store owner accepted with an emphatic yes, saying, "For you, Ai, I'll give it everything I've got!" She was delighted to have established this link between her high school days and her present work. This was in her second winter in Inawashiro.

"The Tobira Project is like an alma mater for me," says Ms. Omasa. "I still pop by the Art Study Room from time to time when I find myself in Tokyo. Though back when I was a Tobira, there was so much that I was no good at..."

Over her three years working for the Tobira Project, she helped set up many Tobi-Labo and experienced many a setback. She modestly confesses that she still finds it hard to manage a project like the Tobi-Labo. But as she told us with a sheepish grin, it was undoubtedly thanks to her experiences as a Tobira that she is able to enjoy working as a curator with people of different backgrounds and interests, taking in her stride the surprises that such a process entails.

Ms. Omasa in her Tobira days

Art communicators beyond the Tobira Project
Tatsuya Ito

The Tobira's growth over three years

As Tobira finish their first year and go onto their second and third years, the scope of their activities gradually expands, and their understanding of the role of a Tobira deepens. Over the three years, the Tobira first try their hand at building small and diverse communities within the museum among themselves – communities mediated by art. They steadily build up experience of running activities through these communities, and by the time they start their third year, they have each found themes that are important to themselves, and have begun to think about what independent activity to embark upon in the future.

Then, with their term over, the Tobira are finally ready to leave the confines of the museum, going out into society at large and applying the diverse values they have cultivated over three years.

We at the Tobira Project refer to the end of the Tobira's terms as the "opening." This plays on the etymological root of the word Tobira – meaning "doorway" in Japanese – and has the sense of opening the door to the next stage. After their opening, each Tobira will go on, as art communicators, to spread the practice of communication through art, whether it be in other regions, at their workplaces, or in their homes. Among Tobira who have opened, there are some who have gone on to start social activities, setting up voluntary groups, NPOs, companies and the like. The main event comes after the opening: the Tobira Project is a social design project whose activities do not end after its three-year term.

The first organization started by our art communicators was a voluntary group called Art Communicator Tokyo. It was set up by members of the inaugural cohort of Tobira at the end of their term, with the aim of serving as a loose network of art communicators after they have left the project. As subsequent cohorts of Tobira finished their terms, the group grew and grew, reaching over a hundred members as of 2018.

Though Art Communicator Tokyo is intended to keep art communicators connected post-opening, it is not a mere alumni association. For example, the ongoing Special Day for People with Disabilities scheme (briefly described in Chapter One) is managed collaboratively by Art Communicator Tokyo and the Tobira Project. On around four days a year, on which the Special Exhibitions are otherwise closed to the public, we invite people with disabilities to come and spend some leisurely time viewing the art. It is a popular program, with each installment receiving around a thousand visitors (including the caregivers).

The initial plan for these Special Days did not include former Tobira. But then we were approached by Mr. Shinji Onodera, a member of the inaugural batch of Tobira, just as his term was about to come to an end.

Mr. Onodera said to us, "There aren't that many places in society that can assist

people with disabilities to visit a museum and experience art. Our group of Tobira is about to leave the project soon, and once we do, we'll be unable to offer that support. But surely we should try not to narrow the scope of these activities that connect people through art? Plus, having experienced art communicators participate will help maintain and improve the quality of the Special Days for People with Disabilities. So we'd really like to continue supporting such people's experience of the exhibitions, even after we leave the project."

The administrative staff discussed Mr. Onodera's suggestion. On the one hand, we wanted our art communicators to leave the project behind after their term and expand the scope of their activities yet further; at the same time, Mr. Onodera's point was well taken. We finally decided that, rather than let art communicators participate individually, the Tobira Project would collaborate with Art Communicator Tokyo on the Special Day for People with Disabilities scheme.

Art Communicator Tokyo currently runs various duties on an equal footing with the Tobi and Geidai as an independent organization. It manages the list of art communicators participating in the Special Days, and divides the work involved for these events with the Tobi and Geidai staff, from advance preparations to management of the actual events. They approach the Special Days for People with Disabilities from a fresh standpoint, as members external to the Tobira Project. They have come to be indispensable partners in the running of the Special Days.

I feel that this is a fruit of the three years that the former Tobira have each spent being active players rather than supporters, and a result of the stance of "each creating their own roles" as art communicators.

The growing activities of art communicators

Art Communicator Tokyo's activities are not limited to the Special Days for People with Disabilities. They run a variety of art-related programs, cooperating not only with the Tobi, but with organizations such as UENO Cultural Park, which runs cultural initiatives around the Ueno area.

However, it is not easy to sustain a voluntary group and its activities. For this reason, ten central members of Art Communicator Tokyo set up the NPO Promotion of Art Communication (PARC) in 2018, to serve as its administrative office.

By having PARC, an incorporated entity, handle its administration, Art Communicator Tokyo has managed to strengthen its footing while still ensuring the flexibility afforded to a voluntary group. They are an example of how our art communicators are slowly penetrating into wider society through creative approaches.

Our art communicators have formed numerous other small voluntary groups, NPOs and companies, which have been launching their various activities. Here I will introduce some

of these newer projects.

There are many people who would value the chance to pop by a museum after work and have someone to chat to while viewing the art – maybe even have some tea afterwards over a conversation about the exhibition. Most of these, however, end up going on their own, not having anyone in particular to invite along.

Surely, then, there was demand for a program that allowed such people – who want to experience art with someone else – to meet one another and share a one-off experience at museums. This was the original idea that led some Tobira to launch "Yorimichi Bijutsukan," meaning "Museum Detour."

Having started off at the Tobi, Yorimichi Bijutsukan attracted a lot of participants every time it was held, and eventually became one of the Tobira Project's signature programs. Renaming itself "Yorimichi Museum" after its founding members finished their terms as Tobira, the program has continued to be run independently by the voluntary group Yorimichi Museum, with museums like the Ueno Royal Museum and Roppongi's Mori Art Museum as their venues.

The hope of these art communicators is that inviting people of different ages and nationalities to gather and enjoy art together at a museum will bring a positive change to the world. The program, accordingly, is run in a way that values conversation among participants over teaching about the art. In Yorimichi Museum, the facilitators encourage participants to express how they felt on seeing the works, creating a viewing environment that values individual perspectives.

Be that as it may, programs cannot be held without knowledge of the artworks. So the team visits the exhibition three or four times in advance for each installment, getting a firm idea of the exhibits and the venue's setup. Mr. Daisuke Ota (42), one of the organizers, says, "We attended gallery talks at the Mori Art Museum, until eventually we were on familiar terms with the curators. We told them what activities we had been involved in as Tobira, and after working out certain agreements – for example, submitting reports of the events – we were allowed to run the program as a collaborative project with Mori Art Museum. We even had the curators join us from the planning stages. We would like to build on this and spread our activities to other museums too." According to Mr. Ota, the most pressing issue is that the participation fee is not quite enough to cover the program's expenses.

Mr. Ota had become a Tobira after working as a tour coordinator overseas. After leaving the Tobira Project, he set up a limited liability company called Diary Creations alongside his work with Yorimichi Museum, deciding to take the plunge out of a desire to connect art communication and business. Both Yorimichi Museum and Diary Creations will take much time and effort to get into gear; Mr. Ota's challenge is just beginning.

Ms. Aki Kudo (43) is one of the founding members of "Take Your Baby to the Museum" discussed earlier in the chapter. The initiative currently operates flexibly as a voluntary team without any corporate status.

Looking back on when Take Your Baby to the Museum was first launched, Ms. Kudo says, “Having become a Tobira, I looked around me and found so many people with different areas of knowledge, different skills. I thought, what could *I* do? At the time, my younger son was just one year old, so I thought I’d make the most of the fact that I was a mother of young children. That resulted in Take Your Baby to the Museum, a program that meets the needs of mothers and babies.”

Behind the project was Ms. Kudo’s personal experiences: having few opportunities to leave the house when her children were still very young; feeling the unfriendly gaze of those around her when she was with her babies in public; wanting to talk to other adults.

“It makes for a nice break from just talking to mom friends. The art sparks conversations with the art communicators, which is different from having artworks explained to you. It’s a warm, relaxing experience. I wanted to give parents some breathing space, a break from the stifling pressures that come with raising a child. We thought, even mothers who’ve shied away from museums might be able to muster the courage to get on that train and come visit if we actively called out to them.”

Though a modest step toward improving society, she and her fellow team members wanted to create more opportunities for parents with babies to enjoy exhibitions with art communicators.

“I wish I could have come when I was having a rough time raising kids.” For Ms. Kudo, Take Your Baby to the Museum offers an environment that she herself could have done with as a mother. Though it requires a lot of energy to stay socially engaged after leaving the Tobira Project, Ms. Kudo continues to be active, motivated by the happy faces of other mothers.


Yorimichi Museum


Take Your Baby to the Museum

Case 8: The Tobira after the Project, Part 2 – “Installing” activities in society

Text: Yoshie Tadaki

Like a “family outing”

On a clear Sunday morning, a flock of children descended on Ueno Station, which bustled with junior and senior high school students in their favorite weekend outfits. There to greet them were members of “knock-knock.” Some children rushed towards the knock-knock flag and gleefully started chatting away, while others lurked behind their chaperone, avoiding eye contact and looking uneasy.

knock-knock is a voluntary group that was set up by art communicators after completing their three-year terms at the Tobira project. The organization visits museums with children who live in children’s homes – not with their parents for one reason or another – appreciating art together through conversations. They have held thirteen of these events since 2014.

“Our approach is not to *take* the children to an art gallery, but almost to ask them out, like it was a weekend family outing,” says Ms. Kaoru Yamaki (60), one of the founding members of knock-knock.

After arriving at the museum, the children were briefed on the day ahead in the lounge, then went through a quick round of introductions and an ice-breaking exercise involving cards showing some of the exhibits. They then entered the exhibition room, each paired up with an art communicator. The art communicators are neither there to support the children nor to explain the exhibits: their role is simply to quietly accompany the children around the exhibition, listening carefully to what they have to say and engaging with them as equals. They tell us that the children, who look a little uncomfortable at the start, gradually loosen up and begin to voice their thoughts as they stand in front of an artwork.

“I like this picture,” a child might say. “I wonder what this is a painting of.” Some even bring up personal matters while talking about an artwork.

Sometimes, the children view exhibits in small groups, rather than paired with the art communicators. Group viewing sessions, in which they all discuss one artwork together at a time, apparently leave a particularly strong impression on the children. Exchanging their thoughts about artworks with their fellow residents from the home is a fresh experience for them – even more so with adults they have never met before.

After finishing the gallery tour, the children and the knock-knock volunteers lunch together. Ordering whatever they want at a restaurant is a rare experience in itself for children who live in an institution.

With the viewing part of the day over, the children create an “Art File” – a kind of scrapbook in which they jot down their observations and reflections about the artworks on

display – using the stationery and cutouts from flyers available. Finally, they collectively reflect on their day, then the event is over. The whole program lasts around four hours in total.

At a later date, the art communicators send letters thanking each of the children who participated in the event for their attendance, with photographs attached. They receive replies from the children.

"There was a girl," says Ms. Yamaki, "who wrote to me that she was very struck by Monet's *Water Lilies*. She's in the art club at her junior high school, but this was apparently her first time visiting a museum. She ended up visiting another exhibition with her own money afterwards, and excitedly told me all about it when we met at the next knock-knock event."

It has been four years since knock-knock became active. So far, their programs have been staged in six museums in Tokyo, including museums in Ueno Park, and have been attended by a total of around a hundred children and employees from the homes, some of whom have participated multiple times.

Knocking on the hearts of children without access to art

knock-knock's conception all goes back to when Ms. Ai Omasa (27), one of the first-ever batch of Tobira who was then in her second year, invited Ms. Yamaki and Ms. Asuka Yamamoto (48) to the "Care x Arts" forum run by the University of Tsukuba Hospital.

After spending around a decade living overseas as a housewife and mother, Ms. Yamaki looked after her aging stepparents for twenty years. Through engaging with different cultures and values, and through caring for her family, she came to feel the importance of art in her day-to-day life. When she was raising her children, she also encountered sick children receiving schooling at hospitals as in-patients. This inspired her to consider ways to create opportunities for these children to experience art.

Ms. Yamamoto, on the other hand, had worked for a television company until she left and applied to the Tobira Project. After her three-year term, she ultimately ended up at her current job of project researcher on the "Diversity on the Arts Project" (DOOR), a certification program for adults organized by Geidai, which is aimed at combining social welfare and art. Ms. Omasa, as related in Case 7, had taken up graduate studies at Geidai during her term as a Tobira, and has since gone on to work as a curator at the Hajimari Art Center in Fukushima Prefecture. All three individuals had an interest in the potential of applying art to activities tackling healthcare and social welfare.

Ms. Yamaki and the others thought, "What if children with limited opportunities to see art could go out to a museum with art communicators?" and proceeded to design a dialogue-based art appreciation program. With such a program, in which the children would engage with art with their own eyes and minds, then share their feelings and thoughts with each other, the adults could listen attentively to what the children had to say, what subtle

observations they made. The program, they decided, should try to gradually build the children's sense of self-worth and their faith in society and adults, by giving them more opportunities to feel that they are being listened to properly, more opportunities to feel accepted.

Although numerous art-viewing programs for children had already been organized through the Tobi-Labo and Museum Start iUeno, Ms. Yamaki and others felt that working through the museums was not enough. There are many children in long-term in-patient treatment, and many living in children's homes. The members decided that they wanted to do something they could do – as art communicators and as individuals – for these children living in environments where diverse arts and cultures are hard to come by.

Shortly into their third year as Tobira, Ms. Yamaki and her colleagues began attending the "Down the Road Seminars," which the Tobira Project runs with the aim of helping the Tobira to shape their activities after their terms. In the course of these seminars, the trio came to think about continuing to run activities themselves after their term. They chose to name their team "knock-knock," symbolizing their will to "knock on the door leading to art," and to "knock on the hearts of people."

Having a name can give momentum to an undertaking. knock-knock gradually set to work, running events such as study sessions on art and care work. Wishing to start putting their ideas into practice, they decided to propose their program to a children's home in Tokyo, where Ms. Yamamoto had connections. She was tasked with approaching the institution.

The thirty or so junior and high school students living in the children's home were from all sorts of backgrounds, and some of them were having to deal with complicated circumstances.

"I remember explaining to the home's staff," says Ms. Yamaki, "that the program would be like a family outing to a museum."

Ms. Yamaki and her colleagues carefully explained to the institution's staff about the merits of dialogue-based art appreciation and the value of meeting and talking to adults for the children. Some of the staff were a little apprehensive. After all, the children were not being invited to the museum by the museum; they were being invited to view art with adults they did not know. Nevertheless, the staff were won over by the passion of Ms. Yamaki and her team and decided to participate in the program.

knock-knock's inaugural "Let's Go to the Museum!" program took place in the summer of 2014. The exhibitions chosen were *Ancient Egyptian Queens and Goddesses: Treasures from The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York* and *Art as a Haven of Happiness*, which were then on view at the Tobi. Though the museum was expected to receive heavy footfall due to the summer holidays, after rescheduling the shifts of the staff at the children's home, the program was set for mid-August. Ms. Yamaki and the team were excited to meet the children.

On the day, four junior and senior high school girls, one of whom attended a special

assistance school, arrived at the museum, chaperoned by an employee of the home. These were all teenagers who could not go home for the midsummer *Bon* holidays for various personal reasons. Very quickly, the members of knock-knock would learn about the harsh realities these teens were facing.

Ms. Yamaki still has a fresh memory of how the teens looked when they first arrived at the event. She recalls: “Even though they were all from the same home, they didn’t seem that close. There was no communication. I tried to ease the tension by asking one of the girls what her favorite color was, but she was stuck for an answer – and that set the tone for the rest of the group, who all remained silent. I really felt how important it was to give thought to the way I addressed them, from the very start. I had to reexamine my whole approach to designing programs for young people who aren’t used to interacting with adults.”

But the response to the program gave them cause for optimism. One of the junior high students, who was visibly nervous that morning, ran forward to hug the knock-knock members at the end of the day, and cheerfully waved to the team from inside the car driving them away. One of the high school students remarked that he had never thought such a quiet place could be so comfortable.

“I was overjoyed,” says Ms. Yamaki. “It made us all the more determined to keep the program going for the sake of those kids who asked us when the next one would be.”

Moving on from the Tobira Project

Shortly after the New Year, the knock-knock team presented a report of their activity to other members of the Tobira Project. For the first event, the three members had had little time to prepare and recruit other Tobira, and had ended up running everything on their own. But for future installments, they wanted to have more members on board.

knock-knock’s second Let’s Go to the Museum! program in March 2015 took place at the Tobi’s *Neo-Impressionism, from Light to Color* exhibition. The team also invited other Tobira to come and help accompany the children on the day. As a result, Ms. Yamaki and her team were able to gather many supporters for their cause, which in turn boosted their confidence and hardened their resolve to continue the knock-knock activities after their three years were over.

Soon, their term came to an end, and knock-knock finally set sail into the world outside the Tobira Project. However, as the members began working to run knock-knock on their own, they were quickly served with a hard dose of reality.

“For a start,” Ms. Yamaki, “suddenly we found ourselves without a base for our activities. During our three years as Tobira, we were able to use the Art Study Room at the Tobi, but once we had left, we didn’t even have a place to hold meetings or store supplies.

Even if we wanted to book a room for the children to fill in their Art Files after their seeing the exhibition, we had to explain who we were and what we do. It was something we all knew, but we realized once again how heavily knock-knock's activities before then had relied on the Tobira Project staff's support."

Becoming an independent organization naturally meant that knock-knock had to secure its own funding. So, in the fall of 2015, knock-knock decided to apply for the Social Grant Program run by the Arts Council Tokyo. The paperwork for the application posed a considerable amount of work for the team members, who were working their full-time jobs on weekdays, but they persevered for the continuation of their project.

knock-knock also had to start from scratch when it came to negotiating with potential museums to visit, as they no longer had the Tobira Project's name to fall back on. However, they dealt with each challenge in order to achieve their goal of sharing with society what they had learned during their three years as Tobira.

Their efforts were eventually rewarded. They received the grant that they had applied for, and as one successful program followed another, more and more institutions began to express their wish to participate in a knock-knock program. At the children's request, knock-knock visited the Tokyo National Museum for the third, fourth and fifth Let's Go to the Museum! The fifth installment was attended by five junior and senior high school boys, the first time that boys had participated. The members found it endearing to see the boys looking a little shy around a young female member of knock-knock. One of the participants, a boy of few words, told them about a samurai armor in his grandfather's house after taking an interest in the traditional craft objects on display, and also spoke about his club activities at school.

The sixth installment took place at the National Museum of Nature and Science (NMNS or "Kahaku") and was facilitated by an art communicator who had previously worked as a volunteer at the museum. They ventured away from Ueno for the seventh installment, going to the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo in Koto Ward instead. After seeing *Pixar: 30 Years of Animation* – a visit requested by the children – the group went to the *MOT Collection* exhibition in the afternoon. The group that day consisted, for the first time, of both boys and girls attending junior or senior high school. What is more, four of them were previous participants who had come back for more.

The exhibition chosen for the eighth Let's Go to the Museum! in 2016 was the *Masterpieces from the Centre Pompidou: Timeline 1906–1977* exhibition at the Tobi. After viewing the exhibition, Ms. Yamaki noticed that one of the girls had drawn the knock-knock logo on the cover of a notebook, which the team had handed out in the Art Study Room. Ms. Yamaki felt glad that knock-knock was leaving an impression on the children, even if they sometimes found it difficult to express themselves through words.

Though it might seem as though their activities had progressed smoothly, their path was by no means without its bumps. After around the sixth installment, two of the three founding members of knock-knock had to part ways with the group: Ms. Omasa moved away

from Tokyo to become a museum curator in Fukushima Prefecture, and Ms. Yamamoto left to prepare for a new job. Their work as art communicators did not provide a livelihood, and they each had their own lives to attend to; situations like this could not be helped. But as a result, Ms. Yamaki was left to manage the organization practically on her own.

There were still art communicators who would offer to help at the actual events. But with the departure of core members who had, along with Ms. Yamaki, carried the project and planned its directions, knock-knock's activities gradually became fewer and farther between. It did not apply for a grant in 2016.


Ms. Kaoru Yamaki

Wanting to see former Tobira open new doors

Watching all this from the sidelines was Ms. Tomoko Nagao (33), a project research assistant at Geidai's Faculty of Fine Arts and one of the Museum Start iUeno staff.

Since 2016, iUeno had been collaborating with various NPOs that offer support to children's homes, families in poverty, children with foreign backgrounds and so on. Together with these institutions, it had launched the "Museum Trip" series of programs that help children to make their "museum debuts." Ms. Nagao was one of the key members working on this initiative.

Needless to say, knock-knock's undertaking, which Ms. Yamaki and others had launched as a Tobi-Labo, had had no small impact on the way iUeno's Museum Trip programs were shaped. It happens from time to time that the Tobira's ventures serve as an impetus for new museum-based activities.

"We'd been thinking at iUeno too," says Ms. Nagao, "about how we could create a support framework that would make it easier for children from different backgrounds to visit museums. So I was very much invested in knock-knock's activities – which aimed to create experiences that had the feel of a family outing – as if it were my own project."

When Ms. Nagao learned that knock-knock's activities were dwindling, she began to think of ways to keep them going somehow.

"I spoke to Ms. Yamaki and suggested that I join their organization as a member, and handle aspects like teambuilding, fundraising and administration – that together we might be able to give knock-knock a fresh start."

Ms. Nagao happened to be on her maternity leave at the time. As a new parent, she had begun to understand, at a more personal level, the value of a program that allowed

children with little access to art to converse over artworks with adult members of society. This was how Ms. Yamaki, an art communicator and former Tobira, and Ms. Nagao, an assistant at Geidai and an iUeno staff member, came to forge their partnership. Under this team, knock-knock resumed its activities with renewed vigor.

The momentum afforded by an experienced project manager

At the time of writing in 2018, knock-knock is operated by a team of around ten art communicators, with Ms. Yamaki and Ms. Nagao at its helm as co-directors. Their activities are fundamentally voluntary, and the members contribute to different extents in different capacities. Though this setup resembles the Tobi-Labo in that, as a basic rule, every task is handled by whoever is available to help, a key difference is that knock-knock does not have at its disposal a pool of a hundred-plus art communicators from whom to form groups as required. However, each member of knock-knock has joined the group in order to contribute something to society as an art communicator.

Members usually share information using online groupware. All exchanges with staff members at museums and children's homes are shared within the group, making sure that members who are unable to attend a meeting can stay up to date. knock-knock intends to continue building a team that can engage in long-lasting activities, while valuing its many connections with committed art communicators – former members of the Tobira Project, itself in its seventh year.

In 2017, knock-knock successfully received grants from Art Council Tokyo and the Children's Dream Fund. This too was, to a great extent, thanks to the involvement of Ms. Nagao, who has the administrative skills required for handling the paperwork for a grant.

External funding has further allowed knock-knock to expand the scope of its activities. There has also been a growing number of children at homes who, after participating in an iUeno Museum Trip, go on to participate in a knock-knock program. Ms. Nagao's wish that the children will make a habit of visiting museums is slowly becoming a reality.

Providing a first contact with art to those without access to it

Over a period of four years, knock-knock has co-organized ten programs with one of the children's homes. The two organizations are currently looking to develop together a more sustainable program, a fruit of the relationship that the two sides have diligently established over time.

According to Ms. Asako Nakamura (real name withheld), a lady in her forties who is an employee at the children's home, "I want the children to go out there and engage with

different adults as often as possible. There are many kids at the home who have grown up without acquiring an idea of what an adult is supposed to be like – something that children of their age are expected to have." At the home, she oversees planning programs aimed at helping the children to better envision their future.

"Even the children who seldom go to school," says Ms. Nakamura, "or who are usually a bit of a handful at the home, behave differently when they visit the museum."

Thorough preparation is needed in order to ensure that the children can feel safe participating in the program. Prior to the program, the members share the necessary information about each child – background, characteristics, or any other things to keep in mind – all the while maintaining the children's privacy. Some of the children are afraid of adults of their parents' age because of their personal past, while others have attachment issues. With such children who harbor fear or distrust toward adults, it is necessary to carefully try to dispel their preconceptions about adults.

Some of the children also have a tendency to test the adults. The members of knock-knock too have experienced this in various forms, from being asked to buy juice or give the child a photograph of themselves to keep, to being asked by a child to take them out somewhere, just the two of them.

It is not easy to respond to these requests. For this reason, the team takes measures to ensure that the children and the knock-knock members develop not one-on-one relationships of trust, but group-on-group. This is why they assign a different art communicator for each event to any child who attends more than once. Although it is challenging at times, knock-knock's goal is to engage children facing adversities in conversations over art, walking alongside them.

In running its programs, knock-knock covers all of the art communicators' necessary expenses; it does not charge the institutions any money. Nevertheless, the children's homes do end up bearing some expenses, such as the children's travel and lunch costs. What motivates them to participate despite this?

According to Ms. Nakamura, "all the people at knock-knock are all sensible and responsible adults, so we have nothing to worry. There are some kids who suddenly decide on the day that they don't want to participate, or who turn up late to events. We're really grateful that the knock-knock staff shows understanding for how the children are, and can respond to such situations flexibly."

Granted, last-minute changes are less than ideal for knock-knock, as it must arrange the appropriate number of art communicators. However, Ms. Yamaki has learned to laugh this off.

"Our concept is of family outings, after all. Such things are bound to happen sometimes. I'm always on pins and needles on the morning of an event as I wait for the children at the nearest train station. I have nothing but respect for the facility staff, who brings the children even after they have been on night duty. I spend my days asking myself what

knock-knock can do right now, in anticipation of all the encounters that its activities will bring."

However much they devote themselves daily, it is difficult for the staff at the children's home to make sufficient time to interact with the children one-on-one. knock-knock, on the other hand, can offer programs in which one adult accompanies each child for the entire day, viewing art together and listening to what they have to say.

At the end of every outing, after they have seen off the children, the knock-knock members always hold a meeting to look back on the day. They all start talking about the children at once: what artworks set their eyes alight, what they talked about, what artworks they would like to see together next. They usually end up sounding as though they are boasting about the child they were paired with, saying things like, "Oh, and another thing she said...!"

"It's a special group, really," says Ms. Yamaki. "The members of knock-knock aren't co-workers at a company or relatives, but they all come together to quietly watch over the children. The people around us must be sensing this positive atmosphere, because it's happening more frequently that another visitor to the museum will come across our group and say something to us like, 'How nice!' There are also more and more museums that welcome knock-knock with open arms."

Reflecting on all the twists and turns that knock-knock has gone through, Ms. Yamaki tells us: "The very fact that children came to participate in knock-knock's programs might be my life's work." For Ms. Yamaki, it is evident that knock-knock has become her life and passion.

Art communicators and society
Sawako Inaniwa

Adding depth to the museum's community

I am sometimes asked the question: "Has the introduction of art communicators at the Tobi brought any changes to the museum as a whole?" The greatest change is likely the increased diversity among the people involved with the Tobi, which has enriched and added more depth to the museum.

If we include both present and past members, there have been over 280 Tobira to date. These art communicators are loosely tied together by common themes and interests. They form and dissolve groups as called for by each activity, working to nurture the museum-based community. These 280 members are also connected to other like minds outside the project. There are former Tobira who have gone on to run workshops or other programs at museums elsewhere; at times, this has led to participants in those programs taking an interest in the Tobira Project and deciding to apply.

The people who form this community held together by common themes and interests – what we might term an "interest-based community" – differ from our patrons who have been visiting since before the museum's renovation, and whose core demographic is over the age of sixty. Through its Art Communication Programs, the Tobi has gained new visitors – on top of its visitors to Special Exhibitions and Public Entry Exhibitions – allowing it to begin co-creating its museum-based community with a more diverse range of people.

Such a change is essential if the Tobi is to achieve the goal stated in its mission: becoming a "doorway to art" that is open to all, and building an "art community as a place for creativity and coaction."

In order to open up the museum to people from all walks of life, there must first be diversity among the people actively involved with the museum, who can then go on to open new doors together. Over the six years since its launch, the project has steadily gained collaborators who use the museum as a platform for proactive engagement, creating opportunities year-round that engender communication between people. Even if we go on knocking on new doors, however, change may sometimes be slow in the coming. But I believe that the sum of these small efforts will eventually have some impact on the relationship between the museum and society.

At present, almost forty thousand people are annually involved in the schemes and events run by the Art Communication Programs. Moreover, there are now members of the Tobira for whom Japanese is not their first language, as well as members with hearing disabilities, resulting in ever-diversifying forms of communication. This is what earned the Tobi the 2017 JAFRA Award (Minister of Internal Affairs and Communications Award), for "proposing a new paradigm for museum practice."

Art communicators forming “circuits that connect people”

In one notable case, the role played by these art communicators extended beyond the exhibition-related programs, becoming an integral part of the exhibition itself. *Kubbe Makes an Art Museum – by seeing, gathering, studying, exhibiting*, held in the summer and fall of 2015, was an exhibition that had its seeds in the Museum Start iUeno project, which is a collaborative effort by nine cultural institutions in Ueno Park. The exhibition interrogated the very *raison d'être* of museums, asking questions such as “What do the acts of observing, collecting, investigating and exhibiting mean for a museum?” “Why is it that we have an urge to collect things, investigate them carefully, arrange them and show them to others?” and “Why have human beings in every age and continent been interested in gathering and exhibiting things?” Addressing such questions – which are essentially questions about how humans perceive the world – the exhibition examined the very basis of the museum with a focus on three elements: participation, diversity, and sharing one’s values with others.

In approaching this monumental theme, we designed the exhibition around the storyline of the picture book *Kubbe Makes a Museum* (pub. Fukuinkan Shoten) by Norwegian author Åshild Kanstad Johnsen. The exhibition featured collections loaned from six museums around Japan, and installations by six contemporary artists. The most distinctive section of the exhibition was the large open-ceiling gallery, where stood a huge structure that evoked museum storage shelves: Katsuhiko Hibino’s artwork *Bigdatana – tana wa mono no sumika*. This was a participatory work in which visitors went around looking at the huge assortment of objects laid out in front of the giant shelf, of which there were more than a thousand types. They each took an empty specimen box, selected any number of these objects according to a theme of their own choosing, and arranged them inside their box to create their very own collection. These boxes were then exhibited on the shelf.

During the seventy-plus days of the exhibition’s run, a total of around a hundred art communicators called the “Guguran” were stationed in the venue, working to create “circuits that connect people.” They were a mixed team formed specially for the exhibition, composed of willing Tobira and members recruited from the general public. The nickname “Guguran” was taken from a character in the original picture book series, a fir tree who is the best friend of the protagonist Kubbe.

Many of the visitors came expecting just to go around seeing artworks quietly, as they would in an ordinary exhibition. Some of them, therefore, found themselves unsure as to how one should go about participating in a participatory artwork. That was where the Guguran came in: they prompted participation in a way that was natural, connecting people and producing a place conducive to co-creation and value-sharing.

Visitors left various comments in the questionnaire. One visitor wrote: “This

experience made me realize once more how much fun it is to spend proper time at museums, looking at things, thinking, talking to the people around you. I had come by myself, but chatting with the friendly staff who approached me let me put my ideas in order." Another wrote: "It was fun both to participate myself, and to see what other participants had made. I really enjoyed getting to see so many different perspectives, because once you become an adult, your opinions and perspective can get pretty inflexible." Another: "*Kubbe* was not only educational – it had its sights firmly fixed on the fundamental nature of human beings. It gave me a fresh awareness of the primal joy of collecting and studying things."

Meanwhile, here are some of the comments from the art communicators: "Being a Guguran was a really enjoyable experience. It involved more than being a guide – after all, we are named after a picture book character. It was our role to befriend the visitors. I felt glad when people were absorbed in compiling their collections, and tried to empathize and help out if someone was perplexed by the exhibit"; "I found out that it wasn't just kids who have the urge to show something to someone and say, 'Look at this!' Being at the venue as a Guguran allowed me to hear so many wonderful remarks and sentiments – all so ingenuous, sometimes passionate."

During this exhibition, I witnessed for the first time how the presence of art communicators can create human interactions that bring a space to life. It was undoubtedly thanks to the deep involvement of art communicators in the exhibition that we had this precious opportunity to question, together with the public, what a museum is and what it should be.

Kubbe Makes an Art Museum

A museum that brings out the best in people

The Tobira Project's goal is not to train professionals. What makes the project distinctive is its stance: shedding the mindset of *making use of human resources*, it attempts instead to create an environment that *brings out the best in people*, and to tackle goals together with them. If such an environment also has the result of cultivating human resources, then that is of course a benefit. However, if we set personnel training as our immediate goal, the risk is that the management team will become too caught up in numbers, measuring the project's success by factors such as the number of Tobira who remain active beyond the project. Similarly, the visitors and art communicators who participate might come to evaluate the project only by the value of the services provided, or of the seminars taught. This would get in the way of the

Tobira Project's mission to explore how human beings fundamentally interact, through its principles such as "communication from the ground up" and "adventuring together."

We want the relationship between citizens, the museum and the university in the project to be not one of users and providers of a service, but of collaborators – a relationship of mutual gift-giving rather than a consumerist give-and-take.

Volunteering at the museum is an activity often explained as "museums providing citizens an opportunity for lifelong learning." This is an idea that has never sat well with me. One book, for example, states the following about volunteer activities at museums and art-related events: "To maintain a good relationship, it is important to clearly establish and respect the role of each side: for the volunteers, the museum activities offer opportunities for learning through civic participation; for those deploying the volunteers, training the volunteers to be supporters is one of the services that they can offer their viewers."[9] Each volunteer, however, is motivated by different interests and social concerns, and this attitude of "deploying" this invaluable motivation is unlikely to bring about creative and collaborative human interaction. This switch from "deploying human resources" to "bringing out the best in people" is surely what museums need to step into the future, and to become hotspots for human interaction.

From quantifying value to "paying it forward"

The Tobira do not receive any monetary compensation for their involvement, although they can attend any program or seminar free of charge. There is a reason we take a "gift economy" approach in running the project, without bringing money into the equation. A gift economy might be described as one that runs on the process of "paying it forward." Money is not used to compensate people for their work or activity; the currency that is in circulation in a gift economy is the relationships formed as a result of people's own free will. Instead of reducing people's work to monetary worth, such a society produces value in the form of the quality human relationships therein, which forge unexpected connections and unite the community with a shared mission. The Tobira Project's management team has experienced this phenomenon time and again over the last six years.

At the root of the museum is the idea of preserving what should be passed on to future generations, an act akin to paying it forward. If a museum, then, wishes to engage in social efforts that play to its own nature, it should evaluate its activities through this viewpoint of paying it forward, and not by trying to quantify their value.

After the end of their three-year term, the Tobira go out into society to continue

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[9] *Bijutsukentei ® Bijutsukan wo shiru kiiwaado* ("Art Certification Test: Key Terms for Understanding Art Museums"; pub. Bijutsu Shuppan-sha, 2010).

engaging as art communicators. In doing so, they must of course consider how to gain monetary compensation for their work. However, at least for their three years with the project, they focus on the pay-it-forward model, which is the most important for art communicators. It is our hope that such activities will lead to art communities steadily and modestly taking root in areas across Japan.

Upon its re-opening, the Tobi chose to call its new division the “Art Communication Programs,” and not “Museum Education Programs.” The reason was that, after considering its own societal function in the twenty-first century, the museum concluded that the initiative would be better equipped to tackle its mission under the name of “Art Communication Programs.”

The Tobi’s Art Communication Programs are comprised of the following three pillars:

1. Tobira Project (social design project)
2. Museum Start iUeno (learning design project)
3. Museum education activities

Museum education, as can be seen, is situated as a part of the Art Communication Programs. The term “museum education” – *kyoiku fukyu* in Japanese – conjures up the image of activities that use artworks as teaching materials, promote art, and impart knowledge about art. It also suggests a clear distinction between educator and educatee.

In reality, however, the value and meaning of artworks – and of the museum as a social institution – can only be discovered through a process of mutual interaction between curators, visitors, and all the variety of people involved. Without this, museums will not be able to become a vibrant social instrument.

This is why the Art Communication Programs place their primary focus on creating a permanent forum for sustained dialogue between the museum and the citizens, and for creating an environment that can update pre-existing values through such dialogue. The end goal is an environment that fosters human relationships – one where each person involved can achieve self-growth through engaging with artworks and cultural artifacts, and which can nurture social empathy and accord.

It is high time that we reconsidered this term “museum education,” which entered widespread use in the 1970s and 1980s. In Europe and the U.S. too, there is no shortage of arguments that the term is no longer fit to describe either the field’s present scope or its professional roles. In Japan, however, it is extremely difficult for a publicly financed institution to rename its initiatives or build a framework for a new activity. As a result, some museums have started to undertake new efforts while still retaining the label of “museum education.”

Name and nature, however, go hand in hand. It is more logical for an initiative’s name and purpose to be aligned, both in terms of securing budget, and for gaining public understanding; it makes it easier to make an impact on society. Museums looking to revamp

their activities should, therefore, at least give thought to the naming. Further, they should reexamine what societal purpose museums serve, and what place these activities should have at their museums, and allocate their budgets and staffs accordingly.

Column: “The innovations of the Art Communication Programs”
Tsukasa Mori

Tsukasa Mori was born in 1960 in Aichi Prefecture. He is the Project Coordination Division Program Director at Arts Council Tokyo (Tokyo Metropolitan Foundation for History and Culture). Mori was formerly the senior curator of the Contemporary Art Center at Art Tower Mito. He went on to become the head curator at Tokyo Art Point, and later the director of the Tokyo Art Point Project, in which he was involved from its launch. He is currently an advisor to the Tobira Project.

Developing the Art Communication Programs as a core activity of the museum

The Tobira Project was first conceived around 2007, when the Cultural Institutions Committee of the Tokyo Council for the Arts – a board of specialists who deliberate on the cultural policies of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government – proposed that the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum (the Tobi) newly establish an art communication scheme as one of its core activities. But the actual parameters of the scheme (including budget and other matters) remained unclear until shortly before its scheduled launch in 2012. It was under these circumstances that I was consulted by the then curators of the Tobi as a former museum curator myself, and became involved in the undertaking. Since the objective was art communication, we decided to invite Mr. Katsuhiko Hibino, an artist and professor at Tokyo University of the Arts who has organized numerous projects that connect people through art, to join us in a discussion about the new art communication scheme. I believe this was in the spring of 2011. This became the starting point for the collaboration that would follow between the Tokyo University of the Arts and the Tobi.

An indispensable initiative for an art museum

Back then, I believe the museum staff involved envisaged the Art Communication Programs as a merely subsidiary undertaking: a program relatively small in scale, intended to do little more than vitalize the pre-existing museum education programs that accompanied the exhibitions. Indeed, it is no easy task to conceive and plan a completely new initiative of a scale large enough to be one of the museum’s core activities (especially given the museum’s staff structure at the time). Nevertheless, this was what the Tokyo Metropolitan Government’s cultural policymakers had proposed for the Tobi after its re-opening – moreover, I saw the Art Communication Programs to be a pivotal undertaking, in that this was precisely the role that would be

required of museums in the future. Museums needed to open themselves up more to society. Such an opportunity to broaden the role of the museum would only come once in a few decades, so we should do it properly if we were going to do it at all. This was what I continued to communicate in order to encourage the curators and the staff involved.

The aim of the Art Communication Programs is to open art to people who have not had the chance to encounter it, but who may be able to discover new possibilities through it. A public museum should surely undertake such far-sighted activities that engage a broader audience, including those not yet initiated in art and those finding art inaccessible.

In this sense, the Art Communication Programs can be seen as a new model of museum education programs at large. Further, though such a scheme represents an expansion of the museum's function, it does not conflict or interfere with the original role of the museum (research, study, and exhibition). I felt that long-established museums that serve this more traditional role could open up to society in their own ways. And I believed the Tobi was in a good position to achieve this.

Spreading new values with passion

Over the six years since its launch, we have seen a growing interest in the Tobira Project. Compared to the typically smaller number of applications for museum volunteers, the open call for the Tobira annually receives over two hundred applications for the forty places available.

How does this happen? Professionals in the cultural sector across Japan have been asking this question, resulting in people constantly coming in to observe the project. I assume those working on equivalent initiatives across Japan want to know the methods behind the project. But what was important for our activities should more or less apply to art museums outside Tokyo looking to launch something similar: the people involved in formulating the cultural policy and the staff structure with which to implement the program.

I encourage others to look to the Tobira Project as a model for art communication programs. If someone is finding it difficult to emulate this model, I fear the issue may be one of passion. Any new endeavor that involves implementing an unprecedented system needs to be led by people who have faith in its possibilities. The scheme must be planned and turned into policy by the right people. This will also require a drastic redistribution of budget that will restructure previous operations, and allocation of staff who can responsibly and continuously manage the programs.

Otherwise it will just become an experimental program that fizzles out after one fiscal year.

The crucial preparatory phase

Another unique aspect of the Tobi's Art Communication Programs, along with the Tobira Project, is their endeavors such as Museum Start iUeno, a collaboration between multiple cultural institutions in the Ueno area. There are, in fact, many areas in cities outside of Tokyo too where museums and other cultural institutions are clustered in close proximity to one another. Ueno Park can serve as a case study for these areas.

Launching such a project requires, more than anything else, that one clearly define its objectives and build the relationships necessary for collaboration. Collaboration between multiple cultural institutions with different organizing bodies essentially entails many challenges. It would be reckless for institutions to launch a scheme together without having a mutual understanding of what mission each institution upholds, by what logic each operates, and without discussing these factors. Planning and orchestrating the scheme from the top down is not sufficient; rather, the staff involved must establish each other's standpoint in advance, and carefully cultivate a relationship of trust. In other words, it is not simply about securing budget, but also about securing the necessary time and people.

Despite this, many public administrative bodies have a tendency to assume that once a program is launched, it will have no issues standing on its own legs. But a marathon, for example, does not happen just because the runners all show up on the day of the race. The course needs to be set up, a headquarters installed and managed, volunteers recruited. It is only because of this thorough preparation that participants can gather and start running the race. The same can be said for a cultural scheme: the plan must be followed by the actual preparation, which will include coming up with justifiable budgetary measures and allocating necessary staff.

Cultural policy as a prerequisite

It is by drawing up the cultural policy that the preparations for a project can really start. Cultural policies are the foundation that allows key players in the arts and culture sector to set projects in motion.

The Tobi's new initiative was only able to develop into what it is today because of the clear mission set out both by the museum and on the cultural policy level. I credit this to the foresight of the members of the Tokyo Council for the Arts at the time. It

was they who formulated a policy proposing that the renovation of the Tobi should not only update its physical architecture, but also revamp its internal operations by implementing a scheme to connect society and art through human interaction. The Art Communication Programs came about because of people who felt strongly about implementing a scheme based on communication as part of the museum's renovation. Transforming a cultural institution is impossible without the effort of the museum staff directly involved in the programs, but it also cannot be done by this alone. It all needs to start with formulating a cultural policy.

An exhibition born from the initiative, and future prospects

The summer of 2015 – three years after the launch of the Art Communication Programs – saw *Kubbe Makes an Art Museum*, an exhibition built on the new initiative's activities. Conceived and organized by curators who uphold the principles of the Art Communication Programs, the exhibition was designed to foster lively communication between the visitors and the art communicators. The fact that this exhibition won the Fifth Japan Society for Exhibition Studies Best Exhibition Award is a testament to the recognition that the innovative nature of this initiative has received.

What I personally hope to see from the Art Communication Programs is continued operation. I want to see the initiative continue to update itself without becoming stuck in a rut. It started off, after all, by taking on something unprecedented; it makes sense, therefore, that it should go on tackling challenges, rather than content itself with the current recognition. Although challenges come with failures, I believe they will ultimately result in something even greater.

Tobira Interview: “Somewhere to get something out of art”

Noriko Kondo (Tobira 2013–2016)

Born in 1981. Noriko Kondo works for the NPO Art Resources Development Association (ARDA) and Appreciate Approach, the latter of which she co-founded in 2018. She was with the Tobira Project from 2013 to 2016.

I have loved art since I was a child, and wanted to find a job that was related to art in some way. While majoring in art history and plastic arts at university, I encountered dialogue-based art appreciation, and came to see viewing art as a creative process. I did not think I could tackle this mission through working for a regular company. So, after graduation, I worked part-time jobs at museums – doing things like manning the galleries – while continuing to look for something I could do. Then the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami struck. It made me recognize anew the importance of art and convinced me that this was the path for me to follow.

That was when the Tobira Project began. I was unsuccessful in its inaugural round of applications, and was accepted in the project’s second year. The Tobira activities gave me a concrete idea of what I wanted to do. My ideal job would involve helping people acquire, through appreciating art, the right mindset for an enriching life – in other words, being a professional art communicator. I finally had a vision of how I could engage with art professionally, and in my own way. It took a lot of time, but it is thanks to that whole experience that I am where I am today.

Through the Tobira Project, I ended up working for the NPO Art Resources Development Association (ARDA). In 2017 I happened to work, as an ARDA employee, on the Tobi’s Kids Day program for its *Great Collectors: Masterpieces from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* exhibition. It was totally hectic on the day, but the event made me realize that being an on-site facilitator was not the only way to be involved; I could also give visitors an exciting experience by taking care of proper planning.

One of the Tobira that I worked with on that day was Sakura Koshikawa. That collaboration on Kids Day eventually led to the two of us setting up Appreciate Approach (“Apupu” for short) in 2018.

We set up a new organization instead of simply working through ARDA, so that we could use it to take on any work that diverged slightly from ARDA’s activities. We chose to form a group rather than work individually – after all, our most valuable asset was our connections with fellow-minded Tobira, and we wanted to make the most of that.

The English word “appreciate” has the various meanings of “being grateful,” “knowing

the value of something," and "looking at something." We wanted the name to have the sense of finding value by feeling one's way around. The light-hearted ring of the name "Apupu" was another consideration.

I feel that there are still many people who think of art as being inaccessible – who do not know how they should approach an artwork. I want to create experiences that allow such people to get something out of art in a more easy-going manner. The process of viewing art does not have an end: you look at an artwork, contemplate it, explore the feeling it evokes in you, look at it again, and so on. This is a process that can even lead you to deep and somber thoughts, the very opposite of "easy-going." But I think that it should have a more accessible entryway – somewhere you can go to as casually as you would to a cafe.

It was through my experience with the Tobira Project that I became interested in the perspective of ordinary people, of those without any specialist knowledge of art. That is why I want to carry on managing Apupu, making the most of both my qualities as a specialist in the field of art, and my perspective as just another member of society.

Chapter Four
The Tobira Project's Present and Future

Toward a fourth-generation museum

In his 1993 *Shimin no naka no hakubutsukan* ("Museum of the People"; pub. Yoshikawa Kobunkan), museologist Toshiro Ito divided the history of museums into three "generations": the first generation focusing on preservation, the second that places weight on the exhibition of a variety of materials, and the third that incorporates the public's participation into its operations. As it stands, however, third-generation practices that have been experimented with since the 1980s have so far failed to take root at most museums, with an overwhelming majority of museums still stuck with the second-generation model.

Aided in part by the economic bubble, a large number of art museums were built in the 1980s in Japan, with the idea that establishing cultural institutions in a given city would add to the culture of the city itself. Many of the buildings constructed during this period, however, are now requiring renovation due to physical deterioration or need for earthquake-proofing. Today, as society has come to realize that merely providing venues for cultural activities is not enough to meet public needs, these expensive renovations must be geared not only toward building repairs, but also fundamental overhauls of their operations.

Amid this trend, the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum (the Tobi) too has followed this pattern, renovating both its architecture and its internal operations in 2012. It is now finally on its way to realizing elements of the third-generation museum delineated by Toshiro Ito. Furthermore, new activities that Ito had never imagined are now emerging. These include the huge number of citizen-led meetings that harness the power of the internet, concrete actions tackling social issues, proposals for a network-based society that stretches beyond the museum, and a research partnership with a university. These initiatives might even be described as functions of the fourth-generation museum.

Today, we at the Tobira Project receive observers a few times a month, from all over Japan and sometimes from overseas. Many are staff members from art museums or music halls that are newly opening or undergoing renovations. Several of these, such as Aomori Prefecture's Hachinohe City Museum of Art and Hokkaido's Sapporo Cultural Arts Community Center SCARTS, have discussed implementing programs inspired by the Tobira Project; staff from the Tobi and Tokyo University of the Arts (Geidai) have often joined these as advisors, holding local lectures and workshops. Projects are additionally being implemented in Okayama Prefecture that are modeled on the structure of Museum Start iUeno, incorporating tools similar to its Museum Starter Pack.

Could it be that the interests of most of these cultural institutions lie in realizing the third-generation museum's focus on civic participation, as well as finding the road map to the yet unseen fourth-generation model? We hope to see a boom in these cultural

institution-based communities.

Fourth-generation museums will have to confront human existence and social issues. Now that the mass adoption of the internet has provided an outlet for individuals from curators, to university professors and other specialists, to members of the general public, to voice themselves – breaking down barriers and forging new connections – its shape can perhaps begin to emerge.

Present-day Japan is what one might call a “mature society.” And yet, it faces a mountain of problems: population aging, poverty, day-to-day difficulties for those of diverse nationalities, and more. We believe that the main challenge that society must grapple with henceforth is mutual acceptance of ever-diversifying values and cultural backgrounds, as well as building communities that can integrate individual values into the fabric of society without alienating them.

There are many problems that cannot be easily solved by individuals. This is precisely why it is necessary to form communities that might serve as safety nets.

The Tobira’s three years of activities at museums pave the way for their continued creation of networks that bring together people with diverse values within their respective environments. We call these loose-knit, culture-based connections “museum ties” – an alternative to local ties or family ties – or an “art community.” Communities sustained by art or cultural assets represent an initial step toward a network-based society that allows people to find common ground while showing mutual respect for the values of others.

Today, words like “social inclusion” and “diversity” are on the lips of many, and there is a growing interest in the creation of inclusive environments that allow anyone and everyone to easily access cultural resources. It is significant that the 2016 Act for Eliminating Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities and the 2017 Basic Act for the Promotion of Culture and the Arts have provided clear legal bases for the right of all citizens to enjoy a life of culture. The outline of the fourth-generation museum will begin to emerge in the form of changes not only within the museum, but also in relation to the society that surrounds it.

Ground broken by the Tobira Project

The social awareness cultivated within the museum is also beginning to bear fruit outside its walls, a fact that may represent another potential for the fourth-generation museum. For example, the Tobira Project has brought about another new initiative at Geidai.

The Diversity on the Arts Project (DOOR), which began in 2017, is focused on art and social welfare. While an art university may seem an unintuitive venue for such an initiative, art and social welfare are extremely compatible: both serve to draw out our inherent abilities, both use creativity to integrate people into society. The “social welfare” addressed by DOOR comprises an extensive range of issues not limited to the elderly or individuals with

disabilities: it also includes support for immigrants, the LGBT+ community, and rehabilitation for citizens returning from prison. Its course options feature lectures by specialists working in social welfare and individuals directly affected by disabilities or difficulties in their daily lives, as well as practical seminars held at welfare facilities.

Roughly fifty members of the public join Geidai students for one year to learn about art and social welfare. Attendees primarily consist of workers from welfare facilities, medical personnel, people with family members who have disabilities, and those who wish to enact social change, in addition to Geidai students.

At present, the Tobira Project and DOOR each allow its members to take a course on the other program. DOOR, which emerged as a separate venture from the Tobira Project, thus offers new stimuli for the Tobira.

The involvement of a diverse range of people aids in rejuvenating conventional ideas, both inside and outside the museum. For example, most prefectural art museums in Japan now feature an organizational section dedicated to museum education activities (in Europe and the United States, there is usually an entire division dedicated to them) – but until 2016, the Tobi did not even have any staff dedicated to such activities. But in 2017, with the Tobira Project and Museum Start iUeno on track, the Tobi finally installed a “Chief of Learning and Public Projects” and implemented an organizational framework to run such programs. The significance was enormous. Furthermore, while it is typical for curators at regional public art museums to oversee both exhibitions and museum education programs, the Art Communication Programs curators at the Tobi also plan entire exhibitions. This allows for exhibitions – which are, after all, the core content of any art museum – that offer artworks predicated on visitor interaction, and that encourage civic participation. This was the case for 2015’s *Kubbe Makes an Art Museum* and 2018’s *BENTO – Design for Eating, Gathering and Communicating*.

Museums as the “liver” of society

This book has thus far been dedicated to explaining the museum-based activities of art communicators. Our intention, however, is not to describe the people who work to support art museums. It is to show the relationship between the museum and the people who resonate with its ethos.

As we touched on in the first chapter, the museum is able to serve as a “space for a slow revolution of the people” because the various cultural assets that it has accumulated and the memories, ideas and values that reside within them are reconstructed and shared by its visitors, and then brought into society at large.

If we were to venture to use the human body as a metaphor to describe the social function of the museum, we would say that it plays a role akin to that of the liver. The liver is

an organ that breaks down the nutrients received from food, metabolizes them, processes toxic substances. It also plays the role of circulating energy throughout the body. Museums are not simply institutions that serve to display and preserve cultural assets. They are valuable, indispensable devices for creating social infrastructure that supports human endeavors. And we believe that they can only function healthily in the presence of human communication.

Many of the Tobira introduced in this book have gone on to establish non-profits or other organizations, each working to independently bring the activities of the art communicator to society at large, even after they have finished their terms. Additionally, there are former Tobira now working as curators at institutions all over the country: The National Museum of Western Art, Setagaya Art Museum, Kawasaki City Museum, 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, and the Hiroshima Prefectural Art Museum, to mention a few examples. If this project continues for another ten years, the activities of the art communicators will have extended its reach yet further.

The partnership between the Tobi and Geidai focuses on human relationships. Our aim is to continue furthering this collaboration, in order that communication between diverse people founded on art and culture can become “social capital” – a social asset that cannot be measured in monetary value. What shape will the Tobira Project take next? And how will museums all over the world continue to change? We can only hope that this book may serve, to whatever degree, as a reference for all those trying to envision the future of museums.

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How the Tobira Project Works

Tobi-Labo p. 38
Special Day for People with Disabilities p. 42
Practical Sessions p. 22 ····Art Appreciation Course
····Accessibility Course
····Architecture Course
Principal Sessions p. 22
Down the Road Seminars p. 23
Art Appreciation Classes (art-viewing programs) p. 83
Architecture Tours p. 23
Post-Tobira activities p. 110

“Down the Road Seminars”

Rounding off the three-year term

At the “Down the Road Seminars,” the Tobira discuss how to remain engaged after leaving the Tobira Project, then put ideas into practice. Participants can design seminars that would be useful for themselves, such as study sessions with guest lecturers, workshops and so on. These seminars are where our art communicators complete their training.

Post-Tobira activities

After the end of their three-year term, the Tobira each return to their own communities. They continue to engage in diverse dialogue-oriented activities, capitalizing on the connections that they established over their term, and the skills they acquired through activities and seminars. The countless small seeds that are produced at the museum go on to sprout in society at large, bringing together people of diverse backgrounds and values.

Tobi-Labo

The Tobi-Labo consist of meetings which the Tobira hold independently and the programs that they implement through these meetings.

Tobira from different walks of life gather and organize unique activities following the “Gather Round” and “Everyone Present” systems, expanding the possibilities of art-mediated communication.

The Tobi-Labo also provide a relaxed environment for fellow Tobira to gather and communicate. The productive time created by this communication introduces new values to the museum.

1. Starting Tobi-Labo by the “Gather Round” system
2. Running Tobi-Labo by the “Everyone Present” system
3. Disband! Then reform

Here are some of the programs!

“Art Communication in Writing”

“Tobikan Yakan Kaikan Tour”

“Tobi-Badge Project”

“Tour with Buggies”

“Creatures of the Forest”

“Go with the Tobira Board!”

“Strolling Through the Graduation Works Exhibition”

“Yorimichi Bijutsukan (Stopping by the Museum)”

Tobira Project (Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum/Tokyo University of the Arts)
The Tobira Project is a social design project based in museums which fosters communities through art. The project comprises art communicators (called “Tobira”) from all walks of life, curators and university educators, and experts working on the front line; together, these participants harness the museums’ cultural resources and develop activities that bring people closer to artworks, places, and other people. The Tobira Project began in 2012, prompted by the reopening of the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, which teamed up with the Tokyo University of the Arts to launch the initiative.
http://tobira-project.info

Sawako Inaniwa
Curator/Chief of Learning and Public Projects
Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum

Born 1972 in Yokohama. Inaniwa acquired her M.A. in Art History at Aoyama Gakuin University, and a second M.A. in Museum Studies at the University College London. She further involved herself in organizing exhibitions and programs in collaboration with local communities and schools through her position at the Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura and Hayama. In 2011, she started working at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum as the Chief of Learning and Public Projects and as curator. She is the co-author of *New Museum Practice in Asia*, edited by Caroline Lang and John Reeve (2018, Lund Humphries Pub. Ltd.).

Tatsuya Ito
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Tatsuya Ito was born in 1975 in Nishiaizu, Fukushima Prefecture. He earned his doctoral degree at Tokyo University of the Arts, majoring in fine art education. He has been involved in the planning of diverse cultural programs and has directed social art projects. Co-authored works include *TOKYO 1/4 ga teian suru tokyo bunka shigenku no arukikata* (“A Walking Guide to the Tokyo Cultural Heritage District – As Proposed by TOKYO 1/4”; pub. Bensei Publishing) and *Myujiamu ga shakai wo kaeru: Bunka ni yoru atarashii komyunithi zukuri* (“Museums Changing Society: Creating New Communities Through Culture”; pub. Gendaikikakushitsu Publishers).

Designing Society Through Art: A Collaboration Between Citizens and Cultural Institutions

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