

Tokyo Midtown Management Co., Ltd.

TOKYO MIDTOWN AWARD: Design and Art Competition

The TOKYO MIDTOWN AWARD is an art and design competition for artists aged 39 and under that was launched in 2008. It has been held annually since 2008 as a project to embody the concept of Tokyo Midtown, with 2022 marking its 15th anniversary. I interviewed Ms. Rumiko Inoue from Tokyo Midtown Management Co., Ltd., who has been in charge of this award project since its inception, and asked her about the overall theme and concept of the competition.



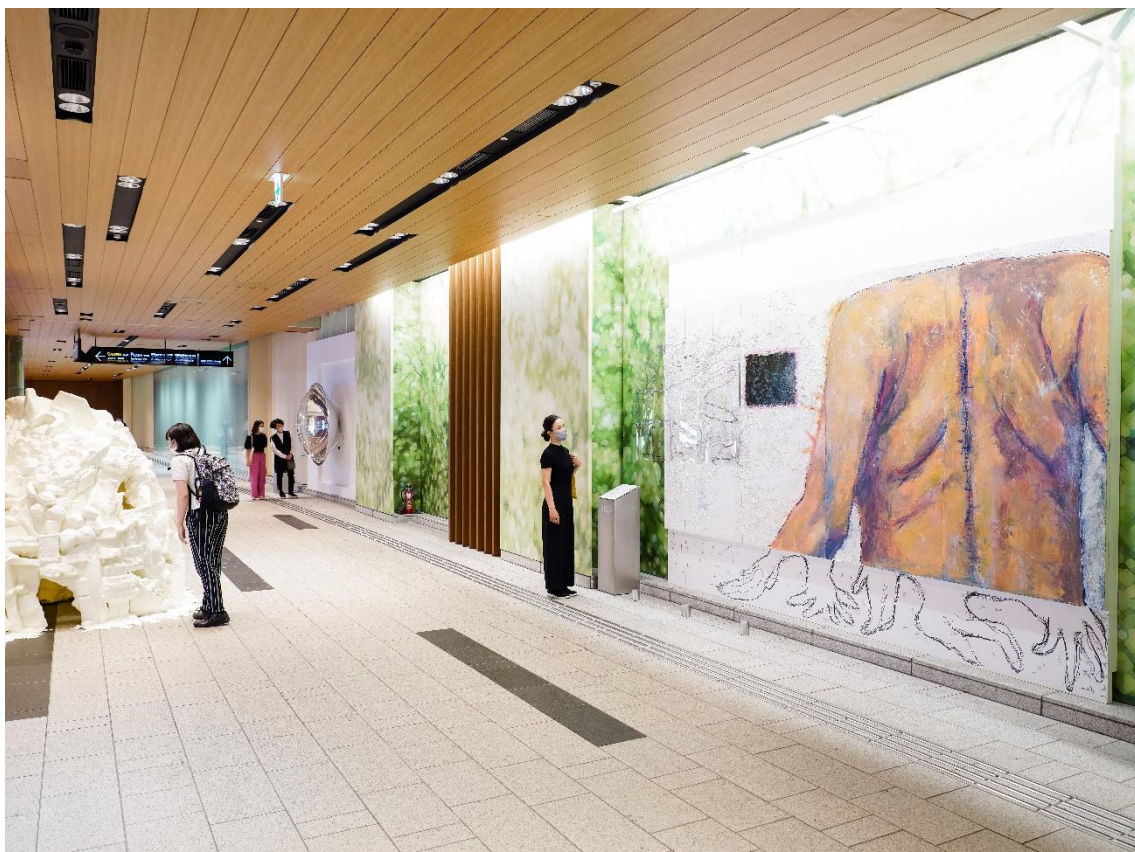
Award-winning artworks from the 2022 art competition are exhibited.

Attempts to creatively implement the ideas of urban development

Tokyo Midtown Management Co., Ltd., the organizer of the TOKYO MIDTOWN AWARD, is in charge of the operation and overall management of TOKYO MIDTOWN, a mixed-use development in Roppongi, Tokyo, which consists of cultural facilities, a hotel, about 130 shops and restaurants, offices, residents, a clinic, and vast green area. Since its opening in 2007, TOKYO MIDTOWN has pursued a vision of sharing JAPAN VALUE with the world, promoting neighborhood creation based on the concepts of DIVERSITY, HOSPITALITY, ON THE GREEN, and CREATIVITY. The

concept of CREATIVITY, which includes the cultivation of new talent in the fields of art and design, has been incorporated into the TOKYO MIDTOWN AWARD, an award project focusing on two categories, design and art, with the goal of discovering and supporting the next generation of artists and designers as well as promoting collaboration between them and Tokyo Midtown. During the 14 years since its launch, out of a total of 21,036 groups that entered the competitions, 75 groups and 79 individuals, and 120 groups and 209 individuals (a total of 125 groups and 226 individuals) have received prizes or been recognized as successful competitors in the art competition and the design competition respectively.

In the design competition, after introducing prize-winning works and selected works, the actualization and commercialization of each work is supported and assistance is provided until the proposed design ideas become available to the public. In the art competition, six groups or individuals who were selected for a final screening are each provided with a grant of one million yen to support their artwork creation, and their works are installed and exhibited in public spaces in Tokyo Midtown for one month. Both competitions not only present awards, but also provide various opportunities to winners of the awards by inviting them to residence programs, providing opportunities to introduce their works, entrusting business to them, and commissioning them to produce works. Continuous efforts are made to create opportunities for collaboration between award-winning artists and designers and Tokyo Midtown with the aim of creating opportunities where such creators can give full play to their talents. This award project received the [Tokyo Nakatsu-Machi Art and Design Award for excellence at the Japan Mecenat Awards 2016.](#)





Award-winning artworks from the 2022 art competition are exhibited.

Shifting the focus of the award from the works along to both the works and the people who created them

During the first 10 years after launching the award, the focus was on the ideas and works submitted, with works simply judged on their own merits. According to Ms. Inoue, they directed their efforts to support creators through presenting awards during those 10 years.

She continues: “Even though there have been some changes in the panel of judges, screening had been made by mostly the same members. Looking back, it was probably in the eighth year that we spontaneously came to adopt a perspective of the future potential of creators, although this was not clearly stated as a criterion for examination. In 2017, after 10 years since launch of the award, when we began to consider the next 10 years of the awards, we came up with a key concept of collaboration between creators and Tokyo Midtown. Instead of judging works on their own merits as in the past, we began to aim to launch awards that not only judge the works alone, but also place a focus on the people who created them, evolving the awards themselves, which gradually has led us to have more opportunities to collaborate with creators, instead of simply supporting them.”

Points regarded as important when judging

”In the 11th year, we introduced the second screening in the design competition. In this stage, each designer works on model building and delivers a presentation. Making applicants undergo a second screening based on the ideas submitted in the initial screening, which is a documentary examination, has helped to refine their works. As a result, the judges’ decisions came to be greatly affected by how dramatically the designers could make the leap at this point. In the art competition, judges came to evaluate not only the works but also the artists’ perseverance, considering whether their works being selected here would do them good, whether their falling into complacency could prevent their further progress in the future, and so on. This led to the judges having intense discussions in a new and different way. However, that’s not to say we focus exclusively on individuals. Rather, we evaluate works from diversified viewpoints such as by considering how an individual artist draws out artistic qualities and substantializes them under the various constraints that Tokyo Midtown has a public place where many people come and go.”





The initial screening of the design competition consists of a documentary examination taking place in the first half, and discussions carried out by judges in the second half.

Diversification of applicants and crossing the boundary between art and design

”Likewise, about 11 years ago, we began to notice scenes where art and design overlap with each other. Design used to be something totally different from art, but with the expansion of the field of design, some artists began to go back and forth between the two fields. For example, an artist who applied for the art competition in the past might apply for the design competition the following year, which is a phenomenon we couldn’t even imagine at first. It was Yusuke Aonuma, who was majoring in design, that won the grand prize at the 2018 art competition. Also, the CAMOTES group that won the grand prize at the 2020 design competition had applied in the art competition before that. They applied for the design competition for the first time that year and ended up winning the grand prize. I think at the root of such changes lie an underlying change in the expansion and diversity of fields. Like the Department of Integrated Design at Tama Art University, some schools have come to provide more opportunities where students can freely practice beyond the boundaries of specialized fields, which I find is an interesting phenomenon. Such modern trends are reflected in the ideas of works submitted and the artists’ approaches, which I find very interesting.”

When planning how to support and collaborate with award-winners after publicly praising them, interviews are conducted with such artists and designers and meticulous research is carried out to find out what kind of support is required at the frontline of design and art. Five years after TOKYO MIDTOWN began, we started to invite award-winners of the art competition to the art program at the University of Hawai’i, and in

2015 we held an exhibition of award-winners' works of the design competition in Milan, Italy, during the period of the Salone del Mobile. Thus, efforts have been increased to showcase the works not only in Japan but also overseas.



At the second screening of the art competition, presentations are delivered by the artists.

Recognizing the importance of providing opportunities to exhibit works, opportunities are created for award-winners at the art competitions to have their works continuously exhibited in Japan by allowing them to be preferentially given opportunities to participate in events in local areas and within TOKYO MIDTOWN, including

Roppongi Art Night, and award-winners at the design competition are also helped to commercialize their works. Such support is provided so that creators can continue to introduce their works in Japan. With an increasing number of award-winners having come to hope for an artist-in-residence program at the art competition in recent years, the organizers will continue to examine the direction of future assistance and how to support those artists through various programs.

Works selected at the art and the design competitions are exhibited in the public areas of Tokyo Midtown. Regarding the possibility of public art contributing to solutions to social issues, Ms. Inoue comments: “We see it as a big challenge for artists to have their works placed in spaces frequented by people including those who are not interested in art. In the first place, if their works are not sufficiently impressive, those who are not interested in art won’t even stop to look at them, so it will also be necessary to consider the nature of such works and if they are exactly what such artists really want to create. Also, if their works are to be placed in a public place, the artists themselves must struggle with a lot of restrictions and consider factors related to installation while maintaining their artistic qualities. It is very difficult to keep a good balance in this regard, but if we don’t take any action just because it is difficult, nothing will happen. We should view the award as an opportunity and consider what can be installed here. I believe our taking actions will eventually lead us to a starting point to consider whether works have the potential to impact society.”

Thoughts of a person in charge of the project

Ms. Rumiko Inoue, Senior Expert of Planning Group, Town Management Department, Tokyo Midtown Management Co., Ltd.



— How did you get into Tokyo Midtown?

”I originally studied policy science and politics, and culture was something totally alien to me, but since I happened to be familiar with foreign languages, I began to be part of Tokyo Midtown project through attracting foreign-based tenants. At first, I was involved in attracting medical institutions and hotels from overseas, but halfway through this project, another plan to install public artworks was launched with the participation of Mr. Jean-Hubert Martin, a former director of the Centre Pompidou in France, so I came to serve as an interpreter and translator for the field of fine art.”

— When do you find your job rewarding?

”This may sound very obvious, but every time I hear that award-winners are remaining active as designers or artists, I find great satisfaction, which might be a kind of parental love [laughs]. Recently, I heard that one artist who received the award at our competition participated in the Aichi 2022 International Art Festival (formerly known as the Aichi Triennale), which is one of Japan’s leading art festivals, and I went there to see this artist on the opening day. Since the total number of award-winners is increasing year by year, I have so many exhibitions to go to and artists to meet, that my schedule is full. I usually collect information through social media, and we at TOKYO MIDTOWN AWARD follow past award-winning artists and designers, summarize their news and deliver their content via our official website or social media. I’m sure that even after I quit this job, I will follow the past award-winners wherever they will go in the country or even abroad [laughs]. One artist said a few years after receiving the award: ‘I was

thinking of quitting my career as an artist, but receiving the TOKYO MIDTOWN AWARD rekindled my enthusiasm and I decided against quitting my career.’ When I heard that, I felt really happy that I had continued to be engaged in this project.”



A snapshot of Mr. Obana Kenichi, award-winner at the 2015 art competition, taken in front of *The cabin of fig* at Aichi 2022 Tokoname Area

—— **What is your future goal?**

“We held the 15th TOKYO MIDTOWN AWARD in 2022. I hope I will be still serving as the representative when we celebrate the 20th anniversary. I have been involved in this award project from the stage of drafting its concept, but even after leaving my position, I would like to keep working to strengthen the foundation of this competition so that the award will continue while ensuring its purity as long as Tokyo Midtown continues. Through working on this project, I have realized that it takes about 10 years for something to take root and forge an identity, and that it sometimes takes 15 years until we finally begin to see something start to make advances. It is very challenging for a company to continue one project for 10 or 15 years, and it often becomes impossible to continue, but I feel that if we can make a system itself sustainable by exercising wisdom, it can eventually lead to the creation of new culture. People who acquired knowledge of art, design and architecture began to join our company a few years ago, including one of my co-workers in charge of the award in the same team who has experience of applying for the TOKYO MIDTOWN AWARD in the past. I realize every day that nothing can be set in place within a few years.”

The works of artists selected at the design and art competition in FY2022 will be exhibited on the first basement floor of Tokyo Midtown Plaza from Thursday 13th October until Sunday 6th November. How about taking this opportunity to visit Tokyo Midtown?

After the interview

When I visited Tokyo Midtown with my friend, I happened to see works of creators who had won TOKYO MIDTOWN AWARD prizes. I remember that when my friend and I passed by the exhibition venue on our way to the station after having a meal at a restaurant and shopping, we couldn't take our eyes off the works there. Such an unexpected encounter can live on in our heart as a shared experience.

In this interview, I had the opportunity to hear from Ms. Inoue and her teammates who have been engaged in both the design and art competitions from the stage of drafting the concept of this award, which has lasted for 15 years. This taught me that the existence of the platform inheriting the concept of urban development beyond the framework of awards presented by the company takes a role as an intersection where many people pass by and interact with each other.

[Mécénat writer: Miharu Yanai](#)

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