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BIOGRAPHY OF IKUO HIRAYAMA

Ikuhijima is one of the most scenic islands in Japan. It faces the Inland Sea and is part of the Hiroshima Prefecture. West of it is Kyushu, and east, the Kii Peninsula. It was in Setoda-cho on Ikuchijima Island that Ikuo Hirayama was born on July 15, 1930. In his autobiography, *A Life of Painting*, he describes his home island: “Ikuchijima itself is small—only twenty-eight kilometers in circumference—but it has a long history. In Japan’s maritime trade, the island is believed to have served as a vital entrepôt between Kyushu and Kyoto. West of Ikuchijima lies the island of Omishima, from where the navy sailed to defend northern Kyushu during the Mongol invasion in the thirteenth century. The temple of Kojo-ji, immediately behind our house, has a three-storied pagoda that dates to the fourteenth century and is designated an Important Cultural Asset.”

Hirayama’s family was the oldest on the island, and was well known and respected there not only for its wealth but also for its unbroken lineage that went back 350 years. About fifty of his ancestors are buried on Ikuchijima. The family line stretches back to Katsui Shubata, feudal lord and vassal of Nobunaga Oda, who seized the imperial capital at Kyoto in the late sixteenth century. In the power struggle that followed Nobunaga’s death, Katsui fought against his successor, Hideyoshi Toyotomi, who soon prevailed and unified the country. After Katsui’s defeat, one of his sons fled to Ikuchijima.

Hirayama’s father, Mineichi, came from a neighboring village but was adopted by the Hirayama family and married the only daughter, Hisano. He had a degree in politics and economics from Waseda University and worked as a journalist for the newspaper *Mainichi Shimbun* in Nagoya City. After his marriage, Mineichi stopped working as a journalist and was elected council member of Setoda-cho. The family being well-to-do, Mineichi could afford to accept honorary jobs that paid him nothing, such as leadership of the town’s agricultural cooperative and membership in the citizens’ welfare committee.

“As far back as I can remember,” Hirayama writes, “the walls of our house were always lined with books.” Many of the books in his parents’ collection had belonged to his grandfather, who had studied Japanese literature, but other titles were even older and were written in classical Japanese and Chinese. Hirayama recalls that his parents also bought him biographies of historical Japanese figures and heroes from other countries.

Of his father, Hirayama says: “I heard that in his student days he attended more lectures on literature than on his own subjects, which probably accounted for the many literary works on our shelves, including books on education, culture, economics, law, and even a few in English.”

But it was Hisano who concerned herself with the children’s education. She was a highly educated woman, and she made sure her children would be similarly privileged. As a *kyoiku*, or education mama, Hisano would check her children’s homework every night and give them either feedback or further instructions. Hirayama writes, “Before I could read, I would ask my mother what the titles were, and slowly I learned to read them myself. . . . I soon began taking a keen interest in reading.” In particular, he remembers “poring over a series of books titled *The Collection of World Art* and being overwhelmed by the art in other countries.”

Even before he could begin his formal education, Hirayama discovered that he liked to draw with pencils and crayons. He would secretly get his sister’s pencil case out of her schoolbag when she came home from school. Seeing her son’s interest in drawing, Hisano

bought him his own crayons and pastels. She also gave him diaries in which to write essays or just short sentences of his impressions of things around him. Throughout his six years in elementary school, she made him go through this exercise every day of his summer, winter, and spring vacations. She would correct his work, then ask him not only to redo it but to decorate it as well with paintings and drawings based on the descriptions he had written. A playful boy, he was not allowed to go out and play until he had finished his work.

This regular exercise drew out Hirayama's artistic talent. While in the second grade, one of his early drawings won second prize in an art contest for students organized by a local newspaper. His mother sent the winning drawing to her uncle Nanzan Shimizu, a talented artist who taught metalworking at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts (later renamed Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music) and asked him if her son was really talented or not. He assured her that he was.

Hirayama also credits his older sister for the early confidence he displayed as an artist. "One day," he recounts in his book, "when my sister was scolding me for something I no longer remember, she suddenly let slip a comment about how well I could draw. Perhaps for that reason I have been able to draw with confidence ever since I was a child."

At an early age, Hirayama also showed exceptional skill as a swimmer. As a six-year-old entering primary school, he found it easier to swim to school than to walk. When he was in the sixth grade, he represented his school in a swimming competition. He won a prize and clocked the best record in the region at the time.

Hirayama, however, did more than draw, swim, and play as a child. Everyone in his family, particularly his father, was a devout Buddhist. Although he did not receive special education in Buddhism, he learned from the examples of both his parents. He would watch them pray every day, morning and evening, and go with them when they visited their ancestors' tombs. He writes in his autobiography: "Each summer during Obon, the festival when the spirits of the dead are welcomed back to earth for a while, we would place lanterns at various points in the graveyard, and I always used to be puzzled at the number of lanterns my family put out compared to other families."

Hirayama also observed that his father had an innate generosity. He never turned down people who came to him for help, and even those who did not seek him out. Hisano complained about her husband's humanitarian ways at first, but she was eventually won over and together they contributed to the restoration and maintenance of various temples and shrines. As a young boy, Mineichi had dreamed of becoming the head of the Eihei-ji, a famous temple of a faction of Zen Buddhism, but that dream was aborted when he was adopted by the Hirayama family and eventually married into it. Though unable to realize his dream, he found other ways to express his devotion to Buddhism. He was so generous with his financial resources that, by the time he died, his family had lost all its properties to debts and donations. Hirayama, however, had learned from his father not to count on the family wealth but rather to live on his own. His father had told him, "You should have only pure pride in your heart, and you should live on your own."

Hirayama was born at a time when Japan was preoccupied with territorial expansion in Asia. In 1931, Japan invaded the Chinese province of Manchuria and made it a puppet state called Manchukuo. The Japanese extended their influence over Inner Mongolia and other parts of Northern China. In 1932, Japanese ultranationalists assassinated Prime Minister Tsuyoshi Inukai. A year later, Japan withdrew from the League of Nations because the organization had criticized Japan's takeover of Manchuria. In 1936, the year Hirayama entered primary school, there was a failed army revolt to establish a more nationalistic government in Japan. Many of the civilian leaders were killed, leaving firm control of the government in the hands of the military.

In 1937, a small fight between Japanese and Chinese troops stationed at the Marco Polo Bridge in Beijing, China, flared into the Sino-Japanese War. After that, Hirayama recalls in his book, “everything became war, war, war. All talk was confined to the outcome of battles and tales of heroism. I became so interested in the war that I started drawing pictures of warships and airplanes.” Although Japan was actively engaged in warfare, Ikuchijima was largely unaffected by the war. Hirayama says that “although the radio and newspapers were reporting on the seriousness of the war, I had little idea how it was proceeding as it was too far removed from my idyllic island.” His parents seemed to have been opposed to the war, but they never told their son, and even donated money for the memorial services for the dead. Hirayama’s brother was ordered to go to China as a student soldier. The young man was among the soldiers who were detained as prisoners of war for about half a year upon the Japanese army’s surrender to the Chinese. He, however, returned home unharmed.

Hirayama himself was too young to be sent out to fight. In 1943, at the height of World War II, he was sent to a boarding school in Hiroshima, the Shudo Junior High School. Accustomed to the leisurely and comfortable life and adequate and good food in Ikuchijima, he had to adjust to the strict military training at the school and to the scarcity of food supplies. He shared a room with five other students. He and other first graders, as the newcomers were called, had to do all the chores. “Since I had never done any chores at home, I remember being constantly scolded because I was so slow,” he recalls in his book, and adds: “Nevertheless, I remained my carefree and easygoing self.”

The militaristic nature of the school did teach him a few lessons. “I believe this period in my life nurtured a sense of cooperation in me. I also learned the value of perseverance and the futility of complaining.”

A year later, he and his schoolmates were sent to work at the army munitions depot in Hiroshima. They were to pack weapons and ammunition in crates to be shipped to Japanese forces. Hirayama and his friends observed that the weapons being supplied to their army were old and inefficient. They wondered how their country could win the war with such substandard armaments, but because they were not allowed to speak out, they kept their opinions to themselves.

Food had become scarce at the school by this time, and a malnourished Hirayama developed a lung disease. He was sent home to rest for two months, during which time he kept thinking of his schoolmates working at the depot. He begged to be allowed to return to Hiroshima. His application was rejected three times before he was finally reaccepted. Since he had not yet completely recovered his health, his parents moved him to a better but more expensive boardinghouse and regularly sent him food. Back at the factory, he and his classmates received classroom-like lessons every day after work from soldiers, who were university graduates and felt sorry for the young boys whose studies had been interrupted by war.

Life at Hirayama’s boardinghouse, he recalls, was “extremely lonely” because his friends remained in the dormitory and he was hungry “each and every day.” He took his mind off his hunger by drawing and writing. He was careful to sign and affix the date on every drawing he finished, and he sent it home immediately so that it would not be destroyed in case of an air raid. That early, his thoughts were on posterity: “Even if I should die, I thought, at least my drawings would be left.”

By 1945, a number of cities in Japan had become targets of bombing by the American forces. Hirayama heard and saw some of the bombings, and he and his friends witnessed the accidental explosion of a transport ship carrying bombs. Such incidents had become familiar to them. Closer to home, however, U.S. Air Force planes were dropping propaganda fliers warning the people to leave Hiroshima because their city would be bombed.

On the morning of August 6 1945, fifteen-year-old Hirayama left his boardinghouse as usual to go to the munitions depot. That day, he was to sort out lumber that would be made into crates. The sky was a beautiful blue, he remembers. His classmates had gone inside a hut in the lumberyard to change into work clothes. At around eight o'clock, he saw a B-29 plane in the sky and several white parachutes descending from it. He ran to the hut and told his friends that "something strange" was coming down. "At that moment," he recalls, "the entire hut was engulfed by a blinding flash as bright as a magnesium strobe. Instinctively, I covered my eyes and threw myself to the ground."

He was about three kilometers away from the epicenter of the blast. He thought at first that the explosion had been caused by the bombs that were being kept in the munitions depot in preparation for the final battle. As he crawled out of the hut, he saw a mushroom cloud form, its colors a brilliant yellow, red, and violet, and gray as well. "It was a ghastly spectacle," he wrote.

He still did not know what had been dropped from the sky, but on his way to the main depot he remembered a talk he had attended about a "new bomb being developed that was as small as a matchbox but capable of destroying a whole city." He passed people whose features had become indistinguishable. "People were lying here and there, tossed about like paper dolls," he wrote. There must have been thousands of them, including his friends. He saw that everything—the munitions depot, the railroad, even the cannons—was either burning or being swept away by strong winds. To this day, he cannot figure out how he was able to escape the burning city.

He looked for the supervisor of the depot, found him, and asked for his orders. The man told him and his classmates to go home and assured them that they would not be considered deserters.

Hirayama started to run. On a hill opposite the main gate of the depot, he watched Hiroshima burning. Then, he started on his journey home. The road itself was burning, so he set about finding another route. Seeing a home that was not ablaze, he went inside to try to find water that was safe to drink. He found some in the kitchen and took a gulp, but the water smelled awful, and he immediately spat it out. Had he drunk it, he would have directly absorbed the radiation produced by the bomb.

He decided to follow the railroad until, about two stations later, he came to a place where it seemed the water was safe enough to drink. It was his first drink in more than twenty hours. He continued walking along the railroad until he spotted a train. He got inside the last car and, finding it empty, lay down to sleep. Later, many wounded and dying people boarded the train and got off along the way. When it stopped by the beach, Hirayama got off, for from there he could see the silhouette of Ikuchijima. He found a fisherman who was willing to take him home. Hirayama was so exhausted that he did not speak to the man at all, not even when he was asked what happened in Hiroshima.

Back on Ikuchijima, he desperately explained the gruesome situation in Hiroshima to his parents and neighbors. But they could not comprehend what he told them until wounded survivors began arriving on the island. Two months after the bombing, Hirayama himself fell ill and was unconscious for about a week. Afterwards, he refused to revisit Hiroshima, or to depict it, for more than thirty years.

In the wake of the atomic attacks, Japan's Emperor Hirohito accepted the terms of the Potsdam Declaration (July 1945) and the war ended. Hirayama was able to return to school. He enrolled at the Tadanoumi Junior High School in Takehara, where he boarded at Nansan Shimizu's house and was drawn into the circle of artists around the great master. At the beginning of his senior year in 1946, Nanzan suggested that he apply for admission to the Tokyo School of Fine Arts. Hirayama was not aspiring to become an artist, and he received no encouragement from his family, either. They did not believe that prosperity went hand in

hand with an artistic career. Instead, Hirayama considered studying law like his older brother, Yoshio. But his great-uncle won out in the end. Nanzan recognized his talent as an artist. Rather than giving the boy formal art lessons prior to the examination at the Tokyo School, however, Nanzan gifted him with these words of advice: “Even if you become good, technique will only take you so far. Then you’ll come to a dead-end. When I was at art school, we used to talk about philosophy and literature as well as art.” Nanzan believed, says Hirayama, “that in order to become a true artist, one’s education should be extensive.” Nanzan gave the boy another piece of advice: he should try not to make money from his painting for the next ten years while his skills were not fully developed; otherwise, the older man warned, Hirayama would ruin his talent. Hirayama promised to take his uncle’s advice to heart.

“Keeping my promises meant I was poor for quite a long time,” Hirayama says in *A Life of Painting*, “but I will be forever in his debt for giving me this basic attitude toward painting. It was to help me enormously in the years to come.” In his book, too, Hirayama reflects on the twists and turns of his young life, which eventually led him to become an artist. The destruction of Hiroshima forced him to move to Tadanoumi Junior High School, live in his great-uncle’s house, and come under his strong artistic influence.

Nanzan, however, would not live to see his dream for his great-nephew fulfilled; he died in 1948 at the age of seventy-three, after Hirayama entered art school.

Hirayama took the examination at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts with great reluctance and little confidence. To his great surprise, he was accepted, the youngest, at age sixteen, among the sixteen successful examinees. Nanzan recommended that he study *nihon-ga*, or traditional Japanese-style painting, which uses pigments derived from natural materials such as shells, minerals, and plants that are ground and then mixed with water and glue. *Nihon-ga* was not a popular field of study after the war because, like other aspects of Japanese or Asian culture, it was thought to be inferior to Western art. However, three masters of *nihon-ga* taught at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts: Yukihiro Yasuda, Kokei Kobayashi, and Kyujin Yamamoto. In 1949, the Tokyo School of Fine Arts became the Fine Arts Department of the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music.

Life at the Tokyo School at the start was a struggle for Hirayama. He lacked formal training in art and felt inadequate among other students who were better prepared and older than he was. At one point, he even thought that his great-uncle had deceived him and that entering art school had been a mistake. He gave serious thought to quitting. He stayed on, however, but in his third year he felt himself in a slump. His professor, Shin-ichi Tani, assured him that was a good sign, and even better that he was experiencing it so early. The teacher encouraged his student to continue drawing and paid particular attention to him and his work.

Taking to heart his great-uncle’s words, Hirayama busied himself reading literature and philosophy and copying Buddhist paintings and other classics. He also took seriously another piece of advice from his great-uncle: “Never use cheap materials. Even if you are just practicing, always stick to the best. If you paint on newspaper or scrap paper, all you will acquire is poor taste.” With that advice in mind, the new art student bought himself a brush for three thousand yen, a small fortune in those days when 1,200 yen could buy enough food for a month. That brush, Hirayama says, remains his favorite fifty years later.

Among his teachers, it was Seison Maeda that Hirayama credits today for having helped him to find his own style. Maeda, whose forte was historical themes, specialized in helping students to develop originality, Hirayama says.

As an art student, Hirayama and his older brother took a room in the apartment of their father’s friend and then moved to their great-uncle’s other house in Tokyo. Their parents sent them a monthly living allowance. Later, he, his brother, and a cousin, who had just entered university in Tokyo, decided to share a room in what Hirayama describes as “a

shabby two-story wooden building with dark rooms and grimy walls.” The building was called Mutsumi-so. Because the rent was cheap, the place attracted many students. They would often gather for drinks and conversation and parties that were peppered with discussions of not only literature and philosophy but even of the sciences. As the only art student there, Hirayama was acknowledged as the authority in his field. Those days, he says, were the best times of his student life. Mutsumi-so would be his home for ten years, for he remained there even after he married and his children were born.

Even before Hirayama’s graduation from the university in 1952, Maeda hired him to be his non-salaried teaching assistant. Shortly after starting at his new job, Hirayama submitted an entry to the Thirty-seventh Japan Art Institute exhibition. To his great disappointment, the work was rejected. He became depressed. But once he recovered his self-confidence, he resolved to give painting the seriousness it deserved. Maeda comforted him, saying it was better to be rejected on the first try. The following year, Hirayama sent in two genre paintings, and one of them, titled *The Way Home*, was accepted. He subsequently submitted other works to other exhibitions, and they were always accepted. In 1964, he was chosen to be a member of the Japan Art Institute.

That same year he married his classmate, Michiko Matsuyama, the top student in the class (he was number two). Maeda and his wife acted as official go-betweens. With her critical eye for art, Matsuyama became one of her husband’s best critics.

Three years later, Hirayama was diagnosed to be suffering from leukemia, a result of exposure to radiation during the bombing of Hiroshima. Tests showed that he had only half the normal count of healthy white blood cells, resulting in anemia. Considerably weakened by his illness, he could hardly paint. Income was scarce, and he and his wife could barely make ends meet. The following year, his health rapidly deteriorated and he seemed to be on the verge of death. He recalls in *A Life of Painting*: “I was getting weaker each day, and my life seemed to be hanging by a thread. In desperation, I took vast amounts of hematinic and vitamin pills, and I prayed I would be able to complete just one more painting I could feel satisfied with. This was my overriding wish as I lay near death.”

By then he had a son, two-year-old Ren, and a baby daughter, Yayoi. Home in Mutsumi-so was a six-mat room measuring about ten square yards. There was hardly room for Hirayama to draw. He felt desperate, he says, not only because he was very ill but also because ten years after entering art school, he still had not evolved a personal style. Defying his doctor’s advice, he decided to test his physical strength by joining a yearly event for students at the university, a sketching trip to Mount Hakkoda in Northern Honshu, which was in reality a mountain-climbing exercise. All throughout the trip that covered several kilometers of difficult terrain, he endured nausea and palpitations. The exquisite scenery, however, was worth the risks he took. He returned to Tokyo still feeling very weak, but refreshed.

The trip to the mountains also gave him an idea for a painting. One day, he found a newspaper article about the Olympic Games being planned for Tokyo in 1964. The Olympic Torch, it said, would be relayed to Japan across the Silk Road of Eurasia. An image formed in his mind: “a monk arriving at an oasis after traveling alone through endless stretches of desert. Just as he runs out of water and is about to collapse, he reaches an oasis. Suddenly, there are flowers blooming everywhere and tall shade-giving trees.” The realization of that image was Hirayama’s painting, *The Propagation of Buddhism (Bukkyo Denrai)*. It depicted the journey home to China from India of Xuanzang, a monk of the Tang Dynasty who left his country without seeking the emperor’s permission, thus risking his life, in order to find and copy the Buddhist scriptures. The painting held far more significance to Hirayama than as an interpretation of a historical scene; it was an expression, he says, of “my own desperate search for salvation.”

He submitted the work to the 1959 Japan Art Institute exhibition and waited for the critics' reviews. On the morning of September 7, he awoke to find a review of the exhibition in the newspaper *Asahi Shimbun*, together with a favorable comment on his painting by a highly respected art critic, Michiaki Kawakita. Hirayama could not contain his joy. "There are no words to describe an unknown artist's joy at being mentioned for his work," he wrote. As a result of Kawakita's words of praise, *The Propagation of Buddhism* was included in the Asahi Shusaku Art Exhibition.

That initial taste of success boosted Hirayama's spirits and aided his physical recovery. More importantly, it led him finally to an artistic style that was all his own, a new approach to Buddhist painting. How he would do that, he had no idea. All he knew was that he would plumb the depths of his religion and explore its richness and beauty. He worked on several Buddha paintings, but felt frustrated that none gave him complete satisfaction. He told himself that if he could not come up with better work soon, he would give up painting entirely.

Despite his frustration, Hirayama tried another Buddhist painting. He called this crucial work *A Vision of the Buddha's Death*. The painting, which would be predominantly gold with some gray and black, would show the dying Buddha surrounded by his grieving followers. Hirayama, however, was stumped as he tried to capture the expression on the Buddha's face as he faced death.

At just this time—June 15, 1961, Hirayama's thirty-first birthday—his father-in-law suffered a heart attack and died. As he studied the old man's face in repose, Hirayama was struck by the "peace and contentment" he exuded, and by the mourners' "profound sadness mixed with tranquility." That must have been what it was like at the death of the Buddha, he thought. In his autobiography, he acknowledges that his father-in-law's death "was a turning point for me and enabled me to complete *A Vision of the Buddha's Death*. . . . The finished painting turned out to be far more vivid than I had imagined." In 1961, the work was submitted to the Japan Art Institute exhibition, where it received generous praise. It won several awards and an Artist of Distinction Citation for Hirayama from the institute. It was subsequently acquired by the Tokyo National Museum of Modern Art.

Years later, Hirayama would say that "painting Buddhist themes is my destiny."

In 1962, Hirayama took, and passed, the examination for the first United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (Unesco) scholarship that would enable the recipient to study in Europe. It was his first trip outside Japan. For six months, he conducted research on a "Comparative Study of Religious Paintings of the Orient and the Occident," concentrating on museums, old churches, and ancient sites, mostly in France and Italy. He also visited Holland, England, Portugal, Spain, and Germany. His exposure to European culture taught him a valuable lesson: in trying to see European culture from the perspective of Japan as a part of Asia, he says, "I also became aware of the common points the two cultures share." He likewise saw, he writes in his book, "how the different countries and peoples in Europe managed to retain their own individuality despite belonging to the same Christian culture." Furthermore, he realized that one should not feel one's culture is inferior to others, and that one should have the humility to accommodate within oneself other people and their cultures.

Upon returning to Japan in May 1963, Hirayama was made a part-time lecturer at the Department of Japanese Painting at the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music. In September 1964, he was promoted to lecturer. For four months in 1966, he was a member of a team from the university that visited the Anatolian Plain in Turkey to research medieval ruins.

The trip to Turkey marked his introduction to the Silk Road. He had been obsessed for some time by a desire to trace the path of Buddhism by following the Silk Road; his visit

to Turkey was an initial step in that direction. In 1968, he made his first Silk Road sketching tour. By 1980, twelve years later, after having visited the USSR, Central Asia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Jordan, China, Tibet, and Borobudur in Indonesia, he had become known as the “Silk Road painter.” His travels sharpened his awareness of how, over a thousand years, cultures that emerged and developed in the West traveled to the East and finally reached Japan. Today, he says he still is not sure what the Silk Road signifies for him, but “for the moment I am pulled to it by an invisible thread and guided by an invisible force.”

In October 1966, Professor Yasuda asked him to join a group from the university that would reproduce the murals inside the main hall of Horyu-ji, the famous early seventh-century temple in Nara Prefecture that had been largely destroyed by fire in 1949. Hirayama was assigned to do the reproduction of the image of the Goddess of Mercy, work that so engrossed him for eleven months that he often ate only rice balls while he worked.

His involvement in the Horyu-ji restoration project stirred in Hirayama an interest in finding the origins of Buddhist art in and outside Japan. In 1968, he traveled to Bamiyan in central Afghanistan, which is famous for cave temples carved out of cliffs and in whose shrines the Horyu-ji murals are said to have originated. He observed that the Bamiyan wall paintings were similar to those he had seen in the caves in Ajanta, India, which had a Persian influence. This observation convinced him that Japanese arts did not originate from only one place, and that even in ancient times there had been large-scale cultural exchanges.

Intrigued, he proceeded to Soviet Central Asia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, sketching the ruins in Tashkent and Samarkand near the Tianshan mountains. During the next three years, he embarked on sketching tours of India, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Iran, Iraq, then Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon. In 1975, he went to China with a group of artists and saw Dunhuang and its stone temples for the first time.

In the meantime, he was gaining renown in Japan as the Silk Road painter. A book on his travels, titled *The Road of Alexander the Great* (written by Yasushi Inoue, with Hirayama's illustrations), was published, and in June 1976 he was awarded the Grand Prize of the Japan Arts by the Association for the Promotion of the Arts for his latest works on the Silk Road. His paintings of the Silk Road were placed on exhibition that same year, followed by four months of exhibitions in Tehran, Baghdad, Damascus, Cairo, and Istanbul. It helped Hirayama's art that by this time Japan had begun to realize, following the first oil crisis in 1973, that relationships between nations could be fostered as much by cultural exchange as by trade and commerce.

Among the reviews of his work that convinced Hirayama he was communicating to the world community through his paintings was one written by the editor in chief of the Egyptian newspaper *al-Ahram*. The article said in part: “Hirayama is an artist of traditional Japanese-style painting, a genre whose subjects are mainly birds and flowers. However, his paintings seem to have as their theme the cultural exchange between East and West. Moreover, he is trying to tell us that behind Japanese culture lies the influence of Buddhism, which was introduced from India and other civilizations lying to the west of Japan.” Hirayama was even more pleased that the editor shared his belief “that cultural exchange must be a two-way street, involving receiving from others and giving to them.”

At Dunhuang, and later at Yungang and Longmen, Hirayama saw the extensive damage that had been wrought on temples and statues by the forces of nature as well as by the pillage that inevitably accompanied the fall of a dynasty. Dunhuang is famous for the hundreds of temples carved into rock cliffs from the fourth century A.D. until the Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368). Of these caves, 492 remain intact. More than the temples, however, it was the beautiful clay figurines inside the caves and the wall paintings that impressed Hirayama because, he writes, “they bore the characteristics of the period in which they were painted. . . . In this way, Dunhuang can be regarded as a museum that displays the complete range of Buddhist

art.” It saddened Hirayama that the paintings and statues were deteriorating. So, for four years beginning in 1983, he took a group of researchers from the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music to Dunhuang and, together with Chinese staff at the research institute at Dunhuang, they researched and discussed ways of protecting the paintings.

To further protect the murals of Dunhuang and to help in the preservation of artwork and cultural heritage on the Silk Road and of Japanese artwork and artifacts throughout the world, Hirayama pushed for the establishment of the Foundation for Cultural Heritage. He envisioned it to be a funding institution that would provide resources to preservation projects. Since he had become, by then, the dean of the art department at the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music, he could not head the foundation. Its day-to-day affairs were to be managed by a secretary-general and an executive director. Its members would consist of corporations and individuals, from whose donations it would derive its funds. Well-known business executives and leaders of Japanese society would compose its board. The foundation was launched in 1988.

Underlying the work of the foundation is what Hirayama calls the “Red Cross Spirit for Cultural Heritage.” He explained this concept in an article for a Japanese publication in 1995: “In the course of my repeated travels I began to feel strongly that we should do something to repay the debt of gratitude for Japanese culture that we owe the Silk Road. This led me to the notion of a ‘Red Cross for Cultural Properties’ that would be dedicated to international cooperation for the restoration and conservation of all outstanding cultural properties, no matter where they are or when they were created. Such an organization would be animated by the same humanitarian spirit that inspired the Red Cross, which was founded to aid fallen soldiers regardless of their allegiance.”

The Red Cross concept was officially adopted by the Japanese government as one of the pillars of its international cultural contributions in 1988, when Hirayama was a member of the advisory body to then Prime Minister Noboru Takeshita. Through Hirayama’s efforts, Japan’s Official Development Assistance, which until then had been supporting only economic projects, gave an unprecedented grant of one billion yen to China to assist in the preservation of the Dunhuang Caves. The grant became the basis for the creation of the Dunhuang Heritage Conservation and Exhibition Center, also known as the Dunhuang Research Institute. Since its completion in 1994, the center has become a symbol of Japan-China cultural exchange and has been frequented by Silk Road researchers and tourists.

In recognition of his efforts to initiate a dialogue of cooperation between Japan and China, and to preserve historical sites in different countries, Hirayama became Japan’s first Unesco goodwill ambassador in 1988. He has since undertaken major restoration projects in various parts of the world.

The first, in 1991, was the restoration of the Angkor Wat stone temples in Cambodia. A Japanese private-sector group had organized the Angkor Rescue Commission to support a team from Sophia University that was investigating the state of the monuments in the aftermath of the Cambodian civil war. Hirayama was appointed chair of the research committee and was tasked to solicit support from both the government and the corporate community. Although Japan at the time had not established diplomatic relations with the new Cambodian government, Hirayama convinced officials from the Japanese prime minister’s office and the Agency for Cultural Affairs to join the mission. He subsequently served as chair of the commission until the Liaison Council on the Preservation Project of Angkor Monuments was organized.

In 1991, he went to Phnom Penh as Unesco’s goodwill ambassador and was asked by King Norodom Sihanouk to cooperate in the restoration of the Angkor monuments. In response, Hirayama held an international press conference jointly with Unesco director-general Federico Mayor in front of the Angkor Wat. Together, they announced that the

Unesco would start rescue work on the monument and that Hirayama would paint the Angkor Wat as his way of generating support for an international rescue campaign. His paintings were exhibited in several places. Earnings from the sale of the paintings were donated to the fund for the rescue project.

In November 1994, Hirayama was invited to join Prince Norodom Ranariddh, Cambodia's First Prime Minister, at a groundbreaking ceremony to mark the launching of the Angkor Monument Preservation Project organized by the Japanese government. (At the time, Hun Sen was Cambodia's Second Prime Minister in a system of dual national leadership.) Hirayama raised a total of forty million yen for the project. More important to him than the financial support was the participation of the local people so that, in his words, "they will recover pride in their national history, acquire techniques that can help their living and eventually assume restoration work themselves."

In 1995, the fiftieth year since the end of World War II, Hirayama chose as a commemorative project the restoration of the 33.6-kilometer city walls of Nanjing in China, which were built in the Ming Dynasty and are considered the longest in the world. The walls had been reduced to twenty-one kilometers, much of them in deplorable condition. At the time, Hirayama chaired the Japan-China Friendship Association; he hoped that the project would help to heal the wounds inflicted by the Sino-Japanese War of 1937, when Japanese soldiers massacred the Chinese residents of Nanjing. To promote the project, Hirayama visited Nanjing several times, taking with him Japanese business leaders and volunteers. He also mounted painting exhibitions in Tokyo and Osaka on behalf of the Council for the Preservation and Restoration of Nanjing's City Walls. By 2001, the Unesco office in Beijing reported that thirty thousand tourists, among them Japanese high school students, had visited Nanjing and laid bricks on the walls. They thus fulfilled Hirayama's wish "that the younger generation, which has not experienced war, will come to work together at the site, moving and piling bricks beside the Chinese people."

In the summer of 1998, heavy rains caused flooding around the Yangtze River, submerging many cultural treasures. Hirayama donated ten million yen from the sale of his paintings to help in the restoration of the artifacts. This amount, along with two million yen from the Foundation for Cultural Heritage and the Art Research Foundation, was provided to China through the Japan-China Friendship Association.

In late 1998, Hirayama was invited to join a cultural mission to the Republic of Uzbekistan, a strategic point in the Silk Road. Under his guidance and with the financial assistance of the Foundation for Cultural Heritage, a team from Kanazawa University has excavated Buddhist monuments in Termiz. Palaces, that existed from the second century B.C. to the third century A.D. have also been found. Research and restoration work on these monuments are in progress. Through Hirayama's efforts, the Japanese government committed itself to support the work of Uzbekistan's artists to preserve their traditional culture. A grateful Uzbekistan government made Hirayama the first foreigner to be admitted to the country's Academy of Arts and Science. (Later, in 2002, Hirayama created and donated the Uzbekistan-Japan Cultural Center in Tashkent as a "caravansary of culture," to promote peace in Asia. He plans to build similar cultural caravansaries in other Silk Road countries.)

In 1995, Hirayama received an urgent appeal for financial help from the director of the Musée Nationale des Arts Asiatiques Guimet in Paris, Dr. Jean-François Jarrige. The government of war-torn Afghanistan had earlier approached the Unesco for assistance in rescuing the artworks at the Kabul National Museum. Years of civil war had destroyed the walls of the museum, putting its precious contents at risk. Unesco, in turn, consulted Jarrige, but France had no budget for such an emergency. Jarrige turned to his friend Hirayama, who immediately remitted fifty thousand U.S. dollars from the Foundation for Cultural Heritage. He also organized a rescue team from Japan and contacted a transport company dealing in

art objects to prepare for a packing mission. The Japanese team, however, never made it to Kabul because their safety in Afghanistan could not be guaranteed. But the French-Unesco team, using ground routes, was able to enter Kabul and move the museum's treasures to safety.

A year later, Hirayama learned that the Islamic fundamentalist Taliban leadership in Afghanistan was threatening to bomb the Bamiyan Buddhas, including the Great Buddha Statue. Immediately, Hirayama alerted the directors of the Freer Gallery of Art at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C., the British Museum in London, the Musée Nationale des Arts Asiatiques Guimet, the Museum für Ostasiatische, and Dunhuang Academy to issue a joint communiqué appealing to the Taliban to suspend the bombing. He also appealed to the moderates among the Taliban to wield their influence on their leaders. In 2000, the moderate leaders of the Taliban regime came to Japan to assure Hirayama that they would protect the Bamiyan Buddhas, and that, if he wanted to see the Great Buddha Statue, they would escort him there. They seemed to have honored his appeal. Regrettably, however, the Taliban proceeded to blow up the two great stone Buddhas. (After the fall of the Taliban regime, in 2005 Hirayama initiated the creation of a research center at Bamiyan near the statues' remains, for use by the people of Afghanistan and researchers from around the world.)

In October 1997, Hirayama led a Unesco-commissioned survey mission to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to look into the preservation and restoration of the ancient tombs with Japanese frescoes in the capital, Pyongyang. These were the tombs of members of royalty and the aristocracy in the Koguryo Dynasty (third to seventh centuries), from whence the frescoes in the Takamatsu Ancient Tomb in Nara, Japan, originated. Hirayama had been advocating adding the tombs to the Unesco World Cultural Heritage List, an idea shared by the government of North Korea, and was cognizant of the important fact that doing so would require the demilitarization of the area around the site. To check the interior of the tombs, Hirayama provided an environmental measurement device and donated other equipment that would help the government preserve the mounds and their contents. As he had done for other preservation projects, he made paintings of the tombs and sold them, donating the money to Unesco for its work on North Korea's cultural heritage. Hirayama emphasized the need for South Korea's cooperation on this project at a meeting of Japanese cultural representatives with South Korean President Kim Dae Jung during the latter's visit to Japan in 1998. He hopes that cultural exchange between the two Koreas will contribute to dialogue in the divided Korean Peninsula.

Hirayama has also made it part of his mission to look after the restoration of Japanese cultural treasures being kept outside Japan. In 1988, the Freer Gallery of Art informed him that a number of pieces in its collection of ancient Japanese art required restoration. Unfortunately, it lacked the budget for the job. The following year, Hirayama led a team of experts from the Agency for Cultural Affairs and professors from the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music to determine the condition of the artworks. They recommended that some of the works be brought to Japan for preservation and restoration, a proposal that was not well received by the gallery, which had a policy that no pieces were to be taken out. After two years of negotiation, the gallery relented, and six scrolls of ancient art were sent back to Japan for restoration.

To avoid similar predicaments in the future, Hirayama initiated moves to establish a system for restoring ancient Japanese arts abroad. The commissioner of the Agency for Cultural Affairs was to formulate the master agreement, and the Tokyo National Research Institute of Cultural Properties and the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music would be responsible for actual restoration. Hirayama worked for a budgetary appropriation

at the Ministry of Finance, and the Art Research Foundation was reactivated so that it could accept donations from the private sector. Hirayama himself donated fifty million yen to the foundation from the sale of his artworks, and raised an additional two hundred million yen.

On one occasion, Hirayama explained his wholehearted support for the restoration of Japanese art pieces that are in Western hands: “Major Western powers have collected ancient Japanese arts, made research on them and introduced the Japanese culture internationally for a long time. . . . Even when they were fighting with Japan during World War II, they treasured these artworks as a cultural heritage. Now that Japan has become affluent, it would only be natural to repay them for their consideration of many decades.”

Many pieces of ancient Japanese art—from the British Museum, the Musée Nationale des Arts Asiatiques Guimet, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, Chester Beatty Library and Gallery of Oriental Art in Dublin, Ireland, and the Polish National Museum in Krakow—have since been sent to Japan for restoration.

Apart from the personal contributions that Hirayama has made to various restoration projects, he has also lent financial assistance to art galleries and museums outside Japan. Learning about a plan to renovate China’s National Art Museum in Beijing in 1990, he donated sixty million yen. Responding to an appeal from the Freer Gallery of Art for help with its renovation, he gave one million dollars and solicited another million from a private company. He also proposed the establishment of a fund within the Smithsonian Institution for the training of American experts in the restoration of ancient Japanese artworks in American art galleries and museums. As of 1998, he had given a total of three hundred million yen from the Art Research Foundation, which he chairs. Hirayama has been made a member of the Smithsonian Benefactors’ Circle and has been awarded the museum’s James Smithson Society Founder medal.

Another recipient of Hirayama’s philanthropy is the British Museum. In 1991, the museum approached him with a request for assistance in renovating its Drill Hall, which contained a room that would become the repository of its Oriental art collection. He donated eighty million yen from the sale of his paintings. The renovation of Drill Hall has been completed, and a number of Oriental art objects have been restored and moved to what is now known as the Hirayama Studio. The Foundation for Cultural Heritage, in turn, has been subsidizing the travel expenses of Silk Road scholars from various countries who wish to study the ancient coins of the Silk Road that are kept in the British Museum.

When the Musée Nationale des Arts Asiatiques Guimet, which specializes in Oriental arts, required a major renovation, it was to Hirayama that its director turned for help. From the sale of his artworks, Hirayama contributed one million dollars for the renovation of the museum’s display hall. He also raised 3.5 million dollars in Japan for the Central Asian display room. Upon completion of the renovation in 1991, Hirayama’s paintings were exhibited at the museum and the French government gave him the *Commandeur des Arts et des Lettres* award for his contribution to cultural exchange and the protection of cultural properties. Five years later, President Jacques Chirac conferred on him the *Officier de l’ordre National de la Legion d’honneur* decoration.

Even Unesco turned to Hirayama when it experienced a shortage of funds in 1990. Hirayama had not forgotten that it was the Unesco scholarship that enabled him to acquire a worldview of art and culture. He gifted the agency with one million dollars, specifying that the money was to go to research on the art, music, history, and archaeology of the Silk Road, and to ten annual scholarships worth ten thousand dollars each. He hoped that the scholarships would go to young people from developing countries who would conduct research at museums and universities throughout the world.

On his own, Hirayama established the Institute of Silk Road Studies, which published an English-language bulletin titled *The Arts and Archaeology of the Silk Road*. Edited by

Professor Katsumi Tanabe of Kanazawa University, the biannual publication was an anthology of papers on archaeology, arts, and history by Silk Road scholars and was sent to 850 universities, research institutions, museums, and libraries worldwide that are engaged in the study of the Silk Road. In 2004, the institute was dissolved and succeeded by the Ikuo Hirayama Silk Road Museum.

Hirayama also set up in 1980 a scholarship program to enable Chinese students to enter Japan's leading universities. Eighteen young Chinese have been recipients of Hirayama Scholarships. Since returning to China, they have become instruments for promoting friendship between their country and Japan.

Since 1995, Hirayama has also used proceeds from the sale of his paintings to build small elementary schools in the remote regions of China, such as Tibet and Yunnan Province. In addition, he has built libraries in preexisting elementary schools and stocked them with books. The libraries have come to be called the Hirayama Hope Libraries.

Hirayama's personal contributions aside, the Foundation for Cultural Heritage and Art Research (formerly the Foundation for Cultural Heritage), which he heads, has been at the forefront of many fund-raising campaigns to rescue cultural treasures. When an earthquake hit the Hanshin region of Japan in January 1995, destroying historical buildings, shrines, temples, and other places of cultural value, the foundation granted an emergency fund of three million yen to rescue art treasures that had been buried under the collapsed buildings. A nationwide fund-raising campaign launched by the foundation drew a total of 34.4 million yen in donations from all over Japan. The foundation boosted the fund with a contribution of 4.6 million yen.

Despite his numerous activities outside the university, Hirayama did not neglect his academic career. In April 1973, he became a full professor and, fifteen years later, was named dean of the Art Department. Less than a year later, in December 1989, he became president of the university, a position he held until December 1995, when he resigned. Three years earlier, in October 1992, he was made an honorary professor of Waseda University in Tokyo.

Hirayama is first and foremost an artist. At an exhibition of his great works at the Japan Institute of Fine Arts, his paintings were classified into three major series: *The Propagation of Buddhism*, *The Silk Road*, and *The Yamato Way*. In addition, he has produced groups of collections to raise funds for various campaigns inspired by the Red Cross Spirit for Cultural Heritage. Among them are *Rescuing the Dunhuang in China*, *Rescuing the Angkor Monuments in Cambodia*, *Restoring the Nanjing Rampart in China*, and *Save the Great Buddha Statues in Bamiyan, Afghanistan*. A great many exhibitions of his paintings have been mounted in Japan and elsewhere, all of them solely to raise funds for the promotion of world peace through the preservation of heritages common to humankind. At the same time, his exhibitions have introduced Japanese culture in many parts of the world and promoted cultural exchange with various peoples.

His artistic success notwithstanding, it was only in 1979, as he said a prayer for the dead at the Peace Memorial Park in Hiroshima, that Hirayama was able to paint his experience of the bombing of that city. For thirty-four years, despite the urging of many people, despite the vivid images seared in his mind, and despite his own desire to paint when his creativity came to a dead end, he could not bring himself to translate on canvas the horrors he saw that day in August 1945. He told himself he needed "to 'purify' my feelings so I could depict the experience in a frame of mind that transcended pity and sadness." He did not want to treat the bombing "as a mere painting motif," he said, and so he waited until he was ready. In *A Life of Painting*, he writes, "I felt that only when I was ready to depict the atomic bombing experience would I be able to find fulfillment as a human being in my work."

When the right time came, he knew what he wanted his painting to convey: "It would have to be a painting that called for contrition and for the salvation of both the victims and

the survivors, as well as all those people living when this weapon of sheer madness was invented.” But he did not want to portray Hiroshima in defeat, but rather like a phoenix rising from the ashes. He would cover the entire canvas with flames and, at the top right corner, to symbolize eternal life amid the flames, he would paint the figure of Fudo Myo-o, the protector of Buddhism. He called the painting *The Rebirth of Hiroshima*. When it was finished, he felt at last that “I had put an end to one chapter in my life.” It had been exactly twenty years since he, a struggling artist, had broken new ground through the painting *The Propagation of Buddhism* and found a way out of a dark period in his life, when leukemia threatened to put an end to all his dreams.

In 1996, Hirayama called on the governments of the United States, France, China, and Japan to have the Atomic Bomb Dome in Hiroshima declared as a cultural heritage. The dome was formerly known as the Hiroshima Prefecture’s Industrial Promotion Center. To Hirayama, its inscription on Unesco’s World Heritage List was a message to the world that nuclear weapons must be totally eliminated if permanent peace is to be achieved.

Now in his seventies, Ikuo Hirayama continues to dream. Topping his list of priorities is the Foundation for Cultural Heritage and Art Research, of which he is still president. He also heads the Japan Institute of Fine Arts. He remains a goodwill ambassador to the Unesco, but is also a special adviser to the Unesco director-general for the World Cultural Heritage Project. In 1997 he opened the Ikuo Hirayama Museum of Art in Setoda-cho. In 2000, he completed a fifty-meter, seven-section mural on the life of Xuanzang, each section depicting a scene from the holy man’s travels. Hirayama started working on it when he turned fifty. The mural is the centerpiece of the Xuanzang Hall at the temple of Yakushi-ji in Nara.

Hirayama continues to win recognition in and outside Japan for his art and his advocacy of cultural heritage preservation. Among these awards are the Crystal Prize from the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland; the Fourth Montblanc Award for Patronage of the Arts; the Unesco Carthage Gold Medal; the Japanese Order of Culture; the Order of James Smithson (Smithsonian); and the Order of Saint Gregory from the Vatican. He has an honorary doctorate in letters from Waseda University and is an honorary citizen of numerous cities inside and outside Japan, such as Hiroshima and Nanjing. He is also a frequent lecturer at international symposia on culture and world heritage.

His latest accomplishment is a new law, passed by the Japanese Diet in 2006 with bipartisan support, after years of advocacy on his part. It is the Law on the Promotion of International Cooperation for the Protection of Cultural Heritage Abroad. It authorizes the Japanese government officially to assist in preserving endangered cultural-heritage sites around the world through the creation of special task forces of specialists, scholars, and researchers.

He has a simple goal for what he calls “the remaining years of my life.” He hopes, he says, to play “an active role in restoring and protecting the cultural heritage of human civilization.”

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