

**Reaction to the Kazuhiko Sano Lecture
March 19, 2009**

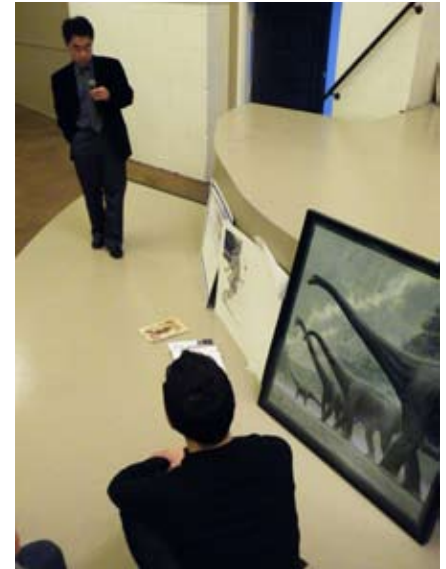
San Francisco Session
UNIVERSITY OF HARTFORD
Limited Residency MFA in Illustration



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Defining our own path from our father's is an age old struggle, and particularly hard for those whose father's cast a broad shadow. They are established in their careers and communities while we are still searching for our voice, struggling with philosophies and establishing goals. Illustrator Kazuhiko (Kazu) Sano's (b.1952) story struck a chord with me as I sat in the lecture hall of The San Francisco Academy of Art on March 19, 2009. The venue was stately, though Kazu was speaking to an early morning hall of 30 master's students, low key and in need of a microphone.



*Kazuhiko Sano Lecturing at the Academy of Art, San Francisco
Photo by author
March 19, 2009,*

His demeanor reflected a confidence in his direction, not just the path he has forged. He stressed the daily discoveries and challenges, not the well earned achievements and stature from an extensive career.

Hiroshi Murata was originally a drawing teacher of mine while I had spent a year at Trenton State College (now College of New Jersey) in 1983-84. Hiroshi asked me to be his studio assistant a year later to work on a number of public artwork installations through the 1990s. He has since become a hinge pin in my career and trusted mentor.

I immediately noticed parallels with my mentor Hiroshi Murata's (b. 1941) and Kazu Sano's lives. Each was born and raised in Tokyo, Japan, son's of architects. Murata's story began 11 years earlier, but both struggled with the post-war environment and new attitudes of the country. Kazu pursued drumming, with influences of the Beatles,

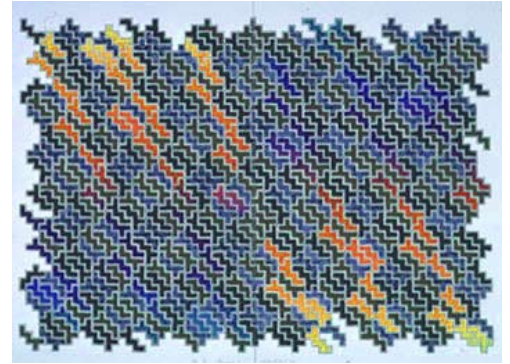


*Portrait of Hiroshi Murata in front of marquetry mural "Resolution"
Photo by Robert D. Corwin, Photo-Arts 1991*

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I'm amazed at the cultural "grazing" each country does during different times in their history, currently represented by the Anime and Super-Flat styles used by many American Artists trying to emulate Japanese genres.

the Kinks and Dorifatahs (Drifters). Hiroshi loved the music of James Brown, Elvis and Jackie Wilson and was a pianist prior to a life threatening motorcycle accident on the streets of Tokyo.



Niwa Hanabi, 1980
by Hiroshi Murata,
Offset Lithograph, Diptych
27.75" x 38", Edition 30

Each of their father's were established in the booming rebuilding of the nation from the allied bombing of World War 2. Murata's father,

Masachika Murata lent his skills to sports facilities, public buildings, and residential homes including the entrance design to the National Museum of Art in Ueno, Tokyo and Komazawa Sports Park Athletic Stadium, Tokyo for the 1964 Olympics. Murata's father had been a top painting student at Geidai, the Tokyo University of Art in Ueno prior to switching to Architecture. Similarly, Sano's father's care and skill impressed upon Kazu the idea of "craft", evident in the subtle fact that Kazu still uses the same pencils as his father in his daily studio work. Both men,

and their patriarchs, echo the standard of a respectful and dutiful son of a hardworking, successful father.



Postwar Japan Photo by U.S. Army, 1945
Sourced from "World War II" by Ronald Heiferman
©1973 Octopus Books Limited, Hong Kong ISBN 0706402626

Each of these men would find, however that their own desires for a unique voice would

Sano has a classic American Illustration style. Wonderfully composed with a N.C. Wyeth sensibility in many instances, but color tends to trend towards the needs of the subject matter. Kazu is masterful in leading the eye into the point of interest in each illustration, as seen on all three of the pieces on this page. Faces are crafted with exquisite care. Textures are rendered only where needed, but deftly handled where placed.

lead them from their father's vocation. Sano found the life of his Bohemian uncle held a mystery for him that his rigid father didn't approve. He was an assistant professor of Painting at Tokyo University.

"... the small apartment smelled of coffee, oil paint and pipe tobacco."

- Sano, lecture quote, 3.19.2009

Sano began noticing the color and musical shift in society with later 1960s with acid



At Play in the Fields of Our Lord, 1992
oil on canvas
by Kazuhiko Sano



Insurrection, 1996
oil on canvas
by Kazuhiko Sano



Madam Butterfly, 2003
oil on canvas
by Kazuhiko Sano

Sano's disciplined approach of creating a "Design a Day" has broadened his picture making options as he takes seemingly abstract strokes and hashes, and eventually turns those visually pleasing designs into final illustrations. The need to cement an engaging design onto the page prior to the infusion of content makes sense to me.

rock and the psychedelic culture. He felt that the level of complexity was beyond his skills as a drummer, but the world of paint and illustration began to fascinate him. He tried to enter the prestigious National University in Tokyo with a focus on Graphic Arts since there was no illustration field in Japan at that time. His efforts were not landing him a place in the university, which focused on academic prowess, so Sano left for the San Francisco Academy of Art. He entered as a Graphic Designer, but was quickly guided into the Illustration Department by astute staff. Sano's self-driven assignments during his three failed years trying to enter the National University in Japan, proved to be what set him apart. What he couldn't convey in English, he was able to articulate in images.

Murata's path led to the Rhode Island School of Design and a MFA from Yale, initially for Architecture, but soon switching to Painting, flipping 180° from his father's path. Hiroshi mentioned in an interview;

"They (parents) didn't get too upset about it because by the time I went into painting, my (younger) brother went into Architecture."

- H. Murata, 2009



Indian Girl, 1987
oil on canvas
by Kazuhiko Sano



Relic, 1990
oil on canvas
by Kazuhiko Sano

Another of Sano's "Design of the Day" pieces is the *Plums*. He stated that each started as a brush stroke of red on a field. When he decided to use plums as the subjects, he gave each plum a personality and name. He rendered each with qualities of those individual characteristics.



Plums, 1987
oil on canvas
by Kazuhiko Sano

Both men developed a unique direction from their peers, tapping their creativity and drive for excellence. The lessons learned found application in their craft.

My reaction to Sano and Murata branching out beyond the shadow cast by successful fathers is something I had struggled with as a teen. My desire to paint, draw and sculpt was always measured by my father's paintings on the wall, sketches in family albums and carvings on the living room furniture.

My own father was known for his eye and hands - with an advanced jump on life by 40 years that I didn't take into account. I've come to realize in my fourth decade

that most young people don't understand the ability that time and experience has on a career. These fathers have built bodies of work, job by job, piece by piece... I remember staring at my first attempts with a brush, not understanding the years of lessons learned by "doing" that my father possessed, and I simply didn't have at the time.

As a father and teacher, I hope to allow my own charges voices to develop in time. I know I have reached goals my own father couldn't pursue, and I hope my own children have the opportunity to reach beyond my own limits. Sano has reached heights within the field of illustration and painting that couldn't have been attempted without the solid base set by his father's sensibilities and work methodology. Murata's career has seen peaks that can only have been attained by the slingshot action of his parents' lessons and example. The opportunities presented to me could not have been acted upon without the drive, craft and follow-through taught by my father. Even though our careers are not what our father's would have chosen, or could hope, our careers are shaped by them. Our lives have been allowed to progress to these points only through the foundations laid by our fathers, and undoubtedly, their fathers before them.

The lesson to me from these men's lives is that I should strive to teach the core skills of excellence in craft, self drive and common decency – dispelling the perception that my charges work should be measured against my own.



Author's Note: No size listings were available for Kazu Sano's work, however the originals viewed were varied in size, but generally within the 16"x20" to 20"x30" range, smooth canvas laid upon rigid panel.