

Presentation 3

What Does “New Normal” Mean to Art Museums? --- Renewal Opening of Kyoto City KYOCERA Museum of Art and Online Activities under the Pandemic

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Profile



Photo: Shinichiro Mikuriya

Tsuchiya Takahide is Director of Exhibitions and Programs at Kyoto City KYOCERA Museum of Art’s Project Management Office. He graduated from the School of Economics at Kwasei Gakuin University. After working in the publishing industry, he obtained an MA in Arts Management at Carnegie Mellon University. He then worked at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and the Japan Society, New York before assuming a position at Mori Building Co., Ltd. (Mori Art Museum Project Office). In addition to organizing exhibitions and their accompanying programs at Mori Museum, he has managed Various aspects of museum management, including international exchange programs and annual art festival, ”Roppongi Art Night.” He assumed his current position in 2018. He is also a part-time lecturer at Keio University.

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Now in its 89th year, Kyoto City KYOCERA Museum of Art originally opened in 1933 (Showa 8) as the Kyoto Enthronement Memorial Museum of Art. The ‘Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art Future Plan’ was formulated during the Museum’s 80th anniversary. The museum then closed temporarily for repairs and expansion. Naming rights were offered to support the redevelopment, with work finally finished in 2019 and the museum reopening as Kyoto City KYOCERA Museum of Art in May 2020 (Fig. 1).



Fig.1 Kyoto City KYOCERA Museum of Art
(Photo: Koroda Takeru)

As COVID-19 began to sweep the globe early in 2020, our museum faced numerous challenges. We had to introduce a reservation system to ensure everyone’s safety, for example, and had to devise ways

to stage exhibitions and related activities under conditions that made large gatherings difficult. Before our museum reopened (before the pandemic), our activities were geared towards people visiting in person, with our online activities mainly limited to pre-event notifications/promotions and post-event archiving. Under unprecedented pandemic conditions, though, people could no longer visit in-person and it became necessary to shift art appreciation online. We never imagined that the so-called ‘Museum at Home’ concept would become so vital.

In our case, our inaugural exhibition after reopening was *HIROSHI SUGIMOTO – POST VITAM*. As part of this, we filmed a conversation between the artist Hiroshi Sugimoto and the critic Akira Asada that took place without an audience. This was then posted on a video-streaming site and it has since been viewed more than 13,000 times. We also thought about creating a guided-tour video or a virtual tour with 360-degree views of the exhibition galleries, but these ideas were shelved, partly because Mr. Sugimoto wanted people to visit the exhibition in person. As part of the following year’s *Bubbles/Debris: Art of the Heisei Period* exhibition, we broadcast a five-hour live talk between participating artists in Kyoto and Tokyo that was watched by over 500 people. We also posted videos of interviews with artists from the exhibition. Over the next few months, these 15 videos in total were viewed over 10,000 times, a sure sign of the potential and reach of online activities. We also posted a video of a lecture by the exhibition’s supervisor, Noi Sawaragi (more than 4,300 views). With the exhibition *Modern Architecture in Kyoto*, held the same year, we streamed a series of ten talks filmed in conjunction with a local group of urban walkers.

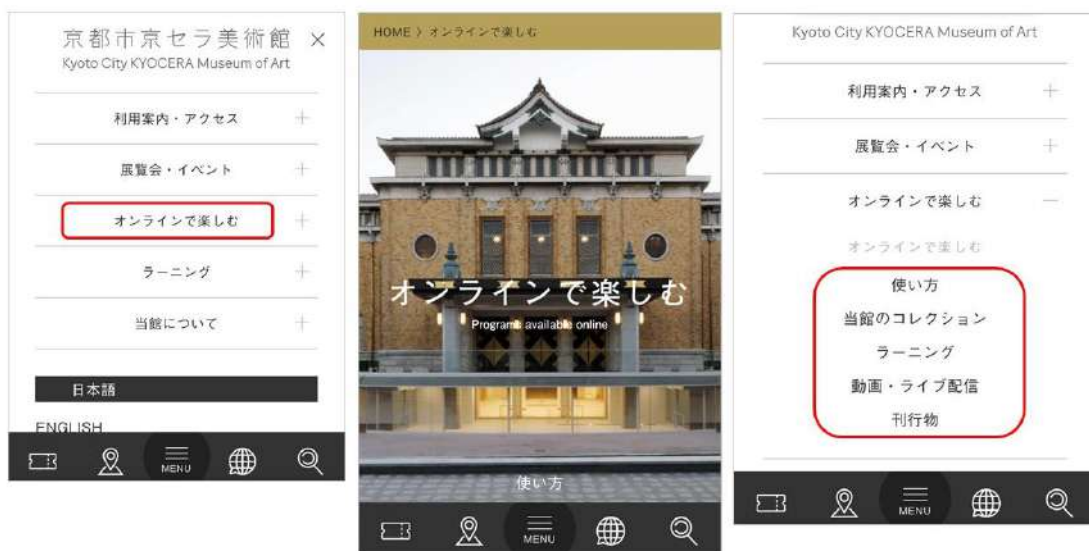


Fig.2 A new section, “Programs available online” was created on the museum website. Viewers are guided to each of the subsections (such as collections, learning, videos, and publications) from the main portal page.
(Kyoto City KYOCERA Museum of Art website [smartphone edition])

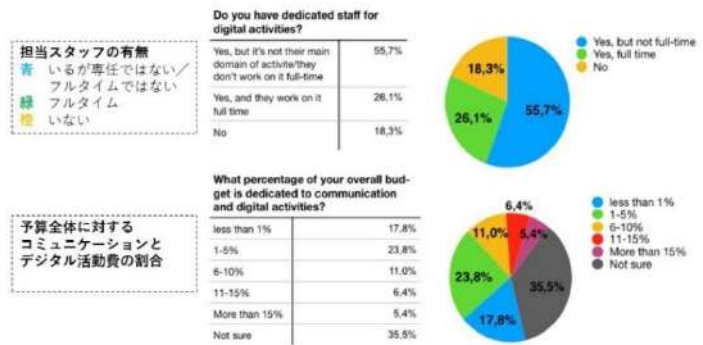
All these experiences finally led us to set up our website’s ‘Programs Available Online’ section (Fig. 2). Knowing it would be impossible to fully recreate the experience of visiting the museum, we avoided names like ‘Online Museum’ or ‘Virtual Museum.’ This section’s main page links to subsections entitled

‘How to Use,’ ‘Collection,’ ‘Learning,’ ‘Videos and Live Streaming’ and ‘Publications.’ These provide information about our collection or downloadable worksheets, for instance. We have also streamed an explanatory video about Japanese painting accompanied by a lecture (a joint production with Kyoto City University of Arts).

In 2020, ICOM conducted a survey entitled *Museums, Museum Professionals and COVID-19*. This looked at how museum activity was changing as museums adopted to the ‘new normal’ of life under pandemic conditions. The survey pointed to a lack of funds or specialized staff when it came to digital activity. Though digital services had increased in the wake of lockdowns, the survey noted that high hurdles remained, with live activities still rare, for example (Fig. 4).

Given this prognosis, several challenges spring to mind. Firstly, we need to conduct surveys and analyze data about viewer attributes and satisfaction levels, for example. Furthermore, we need to strike a balance between ‘online’ and ‘real’ while designing content that is striking and unique enough not to get buried under the avalanche of online educational and entertainment-related content. When producing content, we also need to secure human resources with skills in the areas of text writing, video production, and talking, etc. Alliances with external specialists will be needed to attain some of these ‘skills.’ At the same time, though, with workloads expanding, we may need to reconsider what kind of things are required from ‘curators’ (known here as kakugei-in) in Japan. We will also need to secure budgets and raise funds to pay for these ‘alliances’ and for in-house human resource development. All this prompts the question of what museums should aim for in an age when large gatherings are difficult. Assuming the introduction of digital technology will continue in the post-pandemic environment, this question will involve re-examining the essence of the ‘museum experience’ from a long-term perspective. Ultimately, it will also involve thinking about the issue of ‘sustainability.’

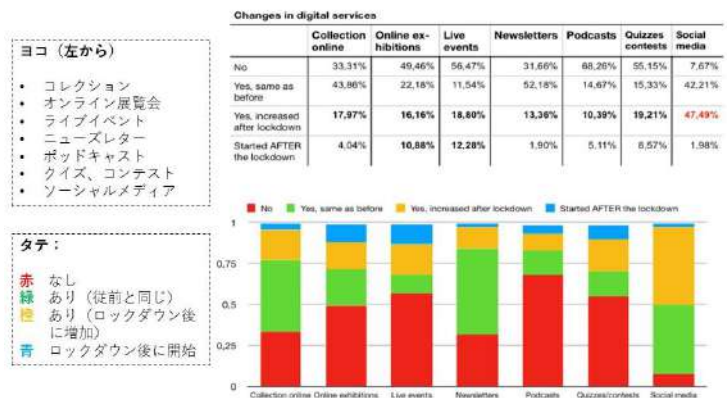
デジタル活動（スタッフ、予算） Digital activities and communication (staff, budget)



Source: *M*

Fig.3 Digital activities and communication

デジタルサービスの变化 Changes in digital activities



Source: *Museums, museum professionals and COVID-19*, ICOM, 2020 (和訳部分は筆者による)

Fig.4 Changes in digital services

There are many merits to online activity. It can provide a museum experience that transcends the strictures of time and space, for example, while also promoting diversity by attaching sign language or foreign-language subtitles to videos. Furthermore, if online programs run concurrently with actual exhibitions and events, rather than appearing afterwards in ‘catch-up’ format, then perhaps the ‘new normal’ will see online programs serving as ‘secondary exhibition galleries’ that complement and enhance museum activities. In this sense, ‘online’ and ‘real’ experiences would complement each other, rather than the former replacing the latter. Art appreciation is meant to rouse the emotions. If the user merely consumes information without experiencing these emotions, the essence of the museum experience will be lost.

As they embrace technology amid a backdrop of COVID-19 and technological innovation, museums are part of a broader social trend. In terms of the future, all these activities being undertaken by museums are probably just the start of a major transition. The museum experience involves encounters with primary materials like artworks and documents. For now, we will need to continue discussing and stumbling toward a ‘new normal’ that enhances this experience while striking a balance between ‘real’ and ‘online.’

Fig.3 source: ICOM (International Council of Museums), *Museums, museum professionals and COVID-19*, 2020, p. 9

Fig.4 source: ICOM (International Council of Museums), *Museums, museum professionals and COVID-19*, 2020, p. 10

(<https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Report-Museums-and-COVID-19.pdf>)