

In Praise of Shadows



“Night Wave” at the Zushi Seashore

Lighting designer Daisuke Yano pursues a very “Japanese way of using light.”

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Light-emitting diodes (LEDs) are increasingly widely used in lighting installations around the world. One artist who has attracted acclaim for his masterful use of LED lights is Daisuke Yano of Tokyo Lighting Design. He conducts a broad range of light displays in the contexts of building and public space illumination as well as for concerts and other such events or installations.

Yano decided to study light scenography at Musashino Art University after having been dazzled by a display at an exhibition on the theme of light which he

attended quite by chance while a sophomore in high school. After graduation, he went to work at a company run by his advising professor and built up his experience in architectural lighting. But wanting to create light works that were closer to people and more artistic, he went independent in 2010.

“The gilded Buddhist statues within the inner sanctum of temple halls is enhanced in a very unique way by the light filtering in,” says Yano. “It’s not just the glitter but the beauty you see in the enigmatic character of the light falling on the images. I feel that the light expresses a sort of sensitivity that is uniquely Japanese. Just as the sun is always in motion, movement can be given to light, which then lends significance to the object being illuminated. When I design light, I always begin from a state of total

darkness. Then I create a work while considering where and how much light is needed.”

Although Yano molds light at will, he stresses that it’s not the light but the object illuminated by the light that plays the central role. He pursues “a Japanese way of using light” which enhances the character of an object through the use of shadows. Thus in addition to LEDs, he sometimes uses incandescent light bulbs in displays that require a special warmth.

One of Yano’s trademark works was “Night Wave,” a three-day event conducted on the Zushi Seashore in October of 2015. Along the beach he set up special light sources five meters high and ten meters apart which emitted a horizontal stream of blue light which illuminated the waves at night. Set off against the darkness, the foaming blue waves broke



across an expanse of sand 300 meters wide. Almost no advance announcement of the event had been made, but word quickly spread through social media, and before long some 10,000 spectators had enjoyed the spectacle of dream-like waves unlike anything one could see in the day time. The event was recognized with the

top award by the Japan Design Space Association.

“My aim is that spectators should be able to savor a light display rather than see it once and be done with it,” says Yano. “In that way, I hope to create sculptures of light that will enable spectators to feel the essence of something as fully as possible. With Night Wave, I think I was able to take the first step in that direction.”

This winter, Yano will create an illumination highlighting meteors at a small park being built in Tokyo’s Nihonbashi district. An illumination system is deployed which, thanks to sensors which can detect the frequency of radio waves emitted by each meteor as

it appears, responds by lighting up, thus enabling spectators to feel the meteors as they descend through the heavens above the park. The lighting is thus not decided on in advance. Instead, the illumination will come to life and change in response to the movements of the cosmos.

“I want to try creating works in open spaces using the sea, the mountains and lakes,” says Yano. “I want to make the lighting interactive, so it responds to the surrounding environment and the people who visit it.”

We can be sure that Yano’s performances will continue to illuminate as yet unknown realms with the beauty of light. 



The “Fudaten Shrine Light Plan.” Candles and LED lights illuminate the Fudaten Shrine, dedicated to Fudaten, the patron (or tutelary) deity of Chofu, Tokyo.