

When I was in elementary school, I took private lessons in drawing. The art school I attended was quite unique in that I was given free reign to do whatever I liked. My tutor gave me full marks and praised me however odd my drawings were. Even when I was reading a comic book, the tutor didn't say anything. This may have been one reason why I became greatly fond of the arts.

About 10 years ago, when I traveled around the world on a reporting assignment, I wrote a series of articles on scenic places readers were encouraged to visit. I took sketchbooks, brush pens and solid watercolors with me on the tour and, whenever I found time to spare, spent 30 minutes or so drawing landscapes that caught my fancy.

Since the sketchbooks I took on the tour were made of low-quality paper, the scores of sheets on which I drew became stiff and warped. Hoping to restore the condition of my drawings, I went to a suburban artists' supplies shop to seek advice. The shop, set up in a large warehouse, displayed paintings and drawings, among others, in a disorderly way, which reminded me of the art school I attended in my boyhood.

A shop assistant, who looked like an art enthusiast, suggested I make color copies, saying major advances in copying technology and paper quality enable superb color reproductions. For a moment, I was tempted to follow his suggestion. But when he

assets. The Kyoto International Culture Foundation plans to reproduce and exhibit at least 15 works by the end of February 2010.

The pictures will be reproduced with state-of-the-art digital technology. A high-definition digital camera and a scanner will be used to digitize the originals, with the images then printed full-size on special hand-made *washi* (traditional Japanese paper) made from *kozo* (mulberry fiber) and mixed with *mitsumata* (paper bush). Some prints will be covered with gold foil and a coating based on Kyoto's traditional techniques, if necessary, so that they closely resemble the originals.

Kyoto, Japan's ancient capital, is home to more than 3,500 Buddhist temples and numerous cultural assets. "Our mission is to protect valuable cultural assets and pass them on to future generations," says Kani Tatsushi, director general of the foundation. "The reproduction project represents a fusion of artisan skills and digital technology, and heralds the dawn of a digital archive."

During my world tour, I visited museums whenever the opportunity arose. In Amsterdam, I went to the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, the national museum of the Netherlands, to see "The Milkmaid" by Jan Vermeer, the Dutch master rivaling Rembrandt and one of my favorite painters.

When I arrived at the Rijksmuseum, probably because I was still a little jet-lagged, I was possessed by the urge to take the small mas-

## Digital Reproduction of Art Works

By Ogata Shinichi

added that color reproduction costs a lot, I gave up the idea because my drawings were not worth it.

In a similar vein, the Kyoto International Culture Foundation, in conjunction with Canon Inc. and other Japanese companies, is promoting a project to digitally reproduce Japanese art masterpieces like *byobue* (folding-screen drawings) and *fusumae* (sliding-door drawings) in the possession of foreign museums. Among them are "Eight-Planked Bridge (*Yatsunashi*)" by Ogata Korin, consisting of a pair of six-panel screens, and "The Old Plum Tree" by Kano Sansetsu, a series of four sliding doors, both of which are owned by the New York Metropolitan Museum.

The reproductions, to be completed in three years' time, will be donated to Japanese temples and shrines which had once owned them as well as to local governments or loaned to schools. The masterpieces to be reproduced are of three types: (1) those owned by foreign museums or collectors, (2) representative classic ink paintings, and (3) historical cultural

terpiece (about 50 cm by 50 cm) down from the wall and bring it home with me.

Joking aside, art lovers will be able to keep valuable paintings or drawings by their sides if exquisite reproductions are widely disseminated, as the Kyoto foundation plans. Even so, reproduction of paintings or drawings is so expensive (¥5 million to ¥10 million apiece) that, regrettably, we can hardly decorate the walls of our homes with such reproductions.

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A large state-of-the-art digital printer reproduces an ink brush painting of pine trees drawn in the 16th-17th century on a folding screen, designated as a national treasure.



A project for digital reproduction of cultural assets is announced against the backdrop of a digital copy of a famous 17th-century painting, also a national treasure, reproduced by the same printer.

Photos: Kyoto International Culture Foundation

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