

time," he adds, "this concept keeps me close enough to my world, one primarily of the easel rather than the mural painter.

"I had always wanted to be a mural painter but I had long since been discouraged by being unable to conceive of the present-day mural as permanent enough to bear a load of serious content. Now that I have come to accept the idea of change as our norm, I accept temporariness, and this allows me to cease thinking of the mural only in epic terms, with all their consequent problems, and to focus on the personal, intimate and lyrical aspects. If a work is truly fine it will last in idea and memory and, if necessary, modern reproductive methods can always record it.

"So, even if only for a time, why not have something truly personal and pay tribute to mood, fragrance, delicacy, evocation, occasion, sensory delight? I should not condone,

however, any of that lush proliferation which has lost specific relation to architecture.

"The Japanese have induced permanence from paper houses. I have been looking more and more at their marvels of screens, their panels and their scrolls. Since the flexibility of the wall as a screen is perhaps the key aspect of our present architecture, the mural and the screen or the mural and the panel may have much in common.

"I can visualize a mural panel, woven with the inventiveness of say Mariski Karasz, made entirely of grasses to endure only for an autumn. For Christmas week we weave another panel as we change from flowers to evergreen boughs. The process of living, surely, is as vital as the fixity of monuments. We need both; but, for a time perhaps, to accept the ephemeral may help us increase that savour of living which is nearly lost."

The Mural as a Ballet in Paint

TAKAO Tanabe, a young painter of Japanese extraction, came last year to Vancouver and began exhibiting interesting paintings in an "abstract-expressionist" style. The approach he favoured had always seemed to me to offer architectural possibilities *par excellence*, so I at once wondered whether he would like to do a mural. I accordingly offered him the opportunity to experiment with an isolated 18 by 17 foot wall which we have in the centre of our gallery at the University of British Columbia.

At this time, Tanabe was living in quite a small studio and painting water colours and he welcomed the chance to work on a larger scale. He commenced by using "Super-kemtone" wall-paint with a water base. For a domestic product, this paint has remarkable brilliance and a good, although not complete, range of colours. It mixes easily, dries in 10 to 15 minutes, and covers in one coat, an ideal medium for painting large areas quickly.

At first Tanabe had only two colours on hand, a dusty medium blue and a deep terra-

cotta. He opened these two cans with gusto and applied the paint in a series of breathtaking flourishes to the existing cream-coloured surface of the wall; the initial forms were created and the entire wall was covered inside of an hour. These first forms were of two sorts, those which grew naturally out of the width of the three-inch brushes he was using and others of a more calligraphic nature which stemmed from Tanabe's understandable feeling for oriental techniques. To view him at work during this original session was like observing a ballet in paint, a ballet of forms created by the motion of the artist's wrist, elbow, shoulder or spine.

In a later session of two to three hours, almost all of this first composition disappeared beneath a new one. This second painting had a more extended range of colours including black, white, bright red and a yellow called "Caprice". This "Super-kemtone" yellow is remarkably vivid and has some depth. The mural became riotously violent, full of fascinating organic forms and stimulating hues. Yet it was explosively out of scale with its site and obviously had to be toned down.

Tanabe was now painting during the open

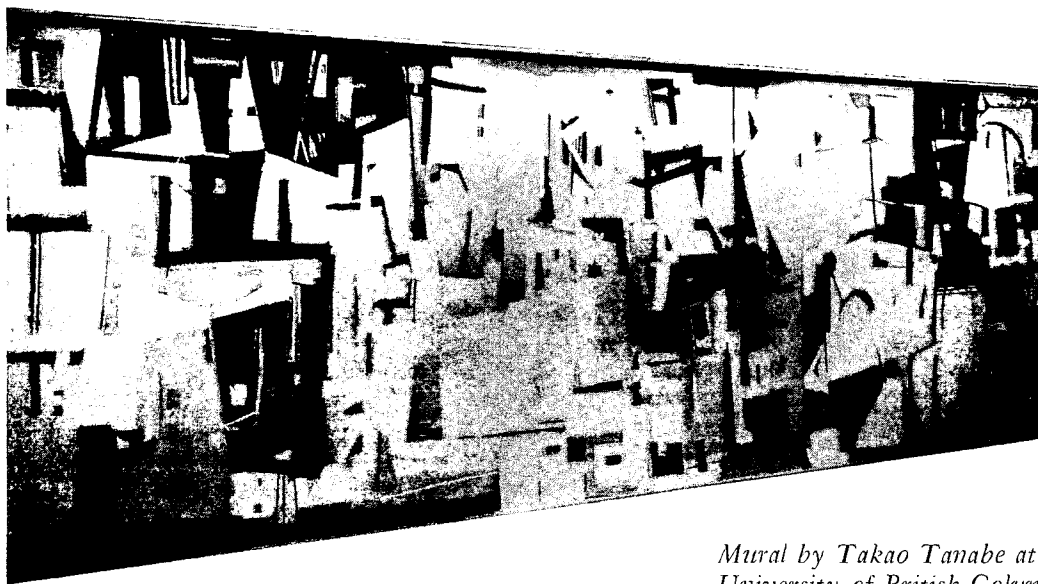
Editor's note: Tanabe, having been recently awarded the Emily Carr scholarship, left Vancouver this October to study in Europe.

hours of the gallery and so he attracted an informal audience of students. During several more sessions he kept working rapidly and, as he worked, the mural literally moved and grew before one's eyes. To the students, the experience was an education in the emotional significance of form. As they watched, they were able readily to develop a sympathy with the painter's decisions, both emotional and aesthetic, as he swiftly created, modified and destroyed forms.

Naturally the artist ran ahead of his audience. One could only sigh over certain apparently ruthless deletions he seemed to make as he went along. I was reminded of a saying of Picasso, that in the course of a painting the artist stumbles across many beautiful effects but that these must be ruthlessly exterminated. I had always thought of this as an

mural lie fallow for a while and he did not touch it again for over three weeks. He then proceeded to bring it to its present state of "completion". As his concern was now for general relationships of areas, he allowed many of the earlier organic forms to disappear. These he simplified or replaced by more nearly flat and geometrical planes, while curves or fuzzy contours tended to give way to straight lines and defined edges. Also textural variations were lessened as areas were blocked in more solidly. Finally, the colour tonality was reduced.

The reproduction on this page shows the mural as it is today. Yellows and two tones of white are played off against three areas, left, centre and right, which include dominating black forms. Small windows have been left in the composition through which earlier stages



Mural by Takao Tanabe at the University of British Columbia

anti-aesthetic pronouncement, but clearly all that Picasso meant was that the artist must not be seduced from his purpose by charming irrelevancies. This we learned by watching Tanabe at work.

A horizontal coherence of areas along the 18 foot width of the wall, however, proved difficult to achieve. Faced with some indecision at this point, Tanabe decided to let the

of the work can be seen. This underlying patchwork of green, red, orange-tan, blue, grey and terracotta, gives depth to the whole.

Tanabe devoted about eight sessions over a period of two months to the mural. Yet he worked so fast during each slow session that he could not have spent more than fifteen hours all told in painting it. He thus regards it as a "mural sketch".

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