Quick Turn Structure: Ōyama Enrico Isamu Letter

Curated by Midori Yoshimoto. Visual Arts Gallery, New Jersey City University, New Jersey, USA, 6 February–6 March, 2014

Ōyama Enrico Isamu Letter invaded the Visual Arts Gallery of New Jersey City University in the spring of 2014 with his Quick Turn Structure (QTS), a visual language that eloquently expressed his experience as a Japanese Italian artist currently based in New York, immersed in graffiti and street culture. In a seemingly endless range of formal variations and mediums, the QTS grew in delicate chains drawn with a mechanical pencil on gesso, in a bold cluster spread over a wall, the exposed ceiling, and the floor, and even in the “screen static” of an iPad. The basic unit is a boomerang form, with two knifepoint ends bracketing conjoined sections of black and white, which morph into flat psychedelic patterns or illusionistic three-dimensionality based on placement and angle.

Aspiring to be a graffiti writer in his youth, Ōyama filled a book with ideas for pieces that demonstrated his particular interest in the movements of the hand, the lines produced, and the synergy among letters and words on the same page. When he decided not to pursue graffiti, he realized that he was free from the obligation to use text, and focused exclusively on creating a form that captured the essence of writing with a spray can. This idea is exemplified by the magnificent ffugurati #89 (fig. 1), which commanded one wall of the gallery. On a vast expanse of canvas, the QTS replicated to form interlocking strands like DNA, simultaneously moving in different directions and occupying the canvas in white, black, and gray, punctuated with red. The background is a different

FIGURE 1  Ōyama Enrico Isamu Letter, ffugurati #89, 2013–2014, acrylic-based aerosol, sumi ink, acrylic-based paint marker and latex house paint on canvas, 83 3/4 x 223 1/4 inches (211 x 567 cm)

ARTWORK © 2014 ŌYAMA ENRICO ISAMU LETTER, PHOTO © 2014 ATELIER MOLE
kind of composition: freely painted black lines and drips interrupted or obscured by latex house paint applied with rollers. Ōyama applies related techniques in live painting performances, including one at the New Jersey City University (NJCU) in March of 2014. According to the artist, what he paints in performances are the beginnings of QTS, so FIGURATI #89 presents both the seminal and developed forms. Unlike graffiti writing, where compositions are worked out beforehand, the QTS grows organically in the creative process, drawing from the scale of the body and its movement at a particular moment. Seeds of this idea find resonance in the works of Abstract Expressionist and Gutai artists from the 1940s and 1950s.

Ōyama’s practice captures another aspect of graffiti: the desire to spread and integrate. The QTS constantly evolves in response to context, but nevertheless maintains a stable core. For FIGURATI #90, a site-specific installation, Ōyama spray-painted a wall, a set of double doors, and then extended the composition onto the edge of a window. Ever recognizable, the QTS in the form of vinyl stickers also crept up the atrium, over a ceiling vent, and along the exposed pipes of the ceiling. It occupied part of the gallery floor as stickers, too. NJCU gallery director Midori Yoshimoto noted that Ōyama went where no other artist had gone before.¹ The mission to participate in all kinds of spaces and cultures lays at the heart of Ōyama’s endeavours. His live painting performances, done in clubs as a college student, was his way of expanding beyond the academic environment. He experimented with integrating the QTS into unexpected contexts, such as mascara packaging, soda bottles, a phone case, buttons for jeans, but did not continue down this path. The QTS eventually showed up in fashion designer Rei Kawakubo’s 2012 spring collection for COMME des GARÇONS. Ōyama’s solo exhibition after NJCU was at the urban clothing store Nepenthes, where different elements of the QTS lexicon floated on grounds evoking the gritty walls often seen around New York City. Those works resonated with the funky street style and colours of the fashion merchandise.

In QTS Ōyama has developed a visual language that represents his mixed-race, multicultural, multi-geographical experiences. It finds itself in different settings and transforms each time to adapt and assimilate, yet stays true to its core principles. The language draws inspiration from an aspect found among modern cities around the globe: the vibe of the street. With one Italian parent and another Japanese, Ōyama grew up in Tokyo and spent extended periods of time in Italy, discovering graffiti there and subsequently developing an interest in New York graffiti. He is the author of the first Japanese-language book on the