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NIGEL SATŌ

A TRIP
EXPO MILANO 2015

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My trip to Expo

But finally, was it a serious matter?

The Milan Expo 2015 had a theme: "Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life." But as I passed through the entrance gates I realized, or rather, my suspicions were confirmed, that the show would not have been so different if the theme was something else entirely: maybe, instead of food, the future colonization of other planets, or traffic congestion, or the postmodern cult of routine authoritarian transgressions, or the world of animals.

So I went round and round and round the Expo, taking in the spectacle; paying little attention, I must admit, to the theme of food, but rather absorbing only what the show conveyed in and of itself. It was by no means uninteresting. Each exhibitor (be they governments or organizations) wanted to give the very best of their very best; while the visitors, people of all sorts, wanted to absorb as much as possible of this condensed core of the whole world.

On one hand, the Expo (and possibly every Expo since the mid-nineteenth century, when someone invented this bloated art genre) is a big farce. I say this without intending to sound mean or curmudgeonly, but simply to acknowledge it, however obvious it may be. The Expo is a little world within our world, where everything is made of kindness and friendship and love and cooperation; a little world in which there are no politics, no war, no ideologies, and no conflict, but only a common desire to do good to all. Everything nice, everything good, nothing real. At times it can be almost disgusting.

However, all the negative things I have to say will end here, and I'm going to leave them behind. Because this backdrop of theatrics and the inherent falsity of the Expo have their redemption. There is another dimension to explore, the real truth of the Expo: everybody there needs to show their best qualities to create the most complete spectacle, the most harmonious, the most complex in structure, and at the same time make it as simple and clear for everyone as possible.

So the result has to be something that money can't buy (even though it certainly helps), and where no one can lie or pretend to be something they're not: they have to create the very best that their imagination will allow.

It's clear that this challenge is what makes the event extremely interesting, and makes it interesting for everyone.

So I explored the length and breadth of the event, looking around and framing potential pictures, with the idea of not letting myself be misled either by an upbeat fable or the pessimistic views of those who are too focused on the falsity of that upbeat fable. Instead, I would focus my mind and my camera on the beautiful and successful things that clamored for attention in that space filled with heavily studied architecture and random juxtapositions. I would focus sometimes on the "official" views, but much more often on the juxtapositions created by chance, the details of the view sometimes falling into place during a moment of exhaustion, when in that overload of stimuli the fantasy took on unforeseen and

unexpected meanings. And I would also capture the swarming spectacle of the audience, who mostly (and this was not what I expected) took everything very seriously, and paid great attention: probably much more attention than we ever pay during school lessons, conferences and religious ceremonies, since all such occasions that are made to be taken seriously tempt us irresistibly to wander precisely for this reason. The Expo, on the contrary, designed to be light and effortless, seems to capture an intense concentration through the multifaceted spectacle it offers.

Sometimes I liked to fix into my memory the overall vision, the “official” one of great architecture, from the most obvious point of view – on the path with everyone else – and give it just a hint of a new interpretation, some small deviation from the perfectly symmetrical point of view, or a little bit of disorder. Much more often, however, I preferred to create images in my own way, intended for my own enjoyment, like abstract paintings with their infinite juxtapositions of geometric and irregular shapes, technical or natural patterns, and muted or intense colors. All combinations that were produced by chance, but by a particular type of chance, favoring the character of the place; full of these installations that are all so different from one another, all independent and self-sufficient and closed in on themselves, but all forced to live side by side, at a strictly identical distance, in the centuriated space of these plots of land.

The randomness of the Expo is important. It produces an inexhaustible variety of unpredictable symbols lying in wait for our imagination. I see, for example, an image of two white blockheads where I wanted to identify the portraits of two Pharisees: those heads were there, carefully composed by the deliberate intentions of a sculptor and an architect, but chance has decided that you, the viewer, could compose them in your field of vision by putting the pillars that supported the roof of the large central walkway in front of them. And you’ll see (if you want to) the weight that was being discharged in the mountings; you’ll feel that force, and so it becomes a metaphor for another kind of weight, maybe the weight of the guilty conscience that hypocrites struggle under and which finally overwhelms them. Or who knows what else.

One thing I would like to note was the general high spirits of the people visiting. Those who were entering for the first time carried strained and puzzled expressions - the vastness of the space was considerable, the path to see it all was long, and this perhaps caused the neophyte to feel a vaguely anguished perplexity - but then, when you got used to the topography of the place, the continuous noise and the variety of shapes and colors, their faces became stretched into a state of satisfaction at being there. The children, lively as they were, behaved better than they usually do on such occasions: I saw them run and play, and I didn't see any snotty brats throwing tantrums. And as a result of this, the parents and caregivers were also much better than usual: I never came across adults giving the usual boring lectures or reciting the customary dramatic complaints about the behavior of children.

I put together this book because I wanted to make sure, in years to come, that I could relive and recall from memory the special atmosphere of the days spent in this strange place, suspended between extreme fiction and extreme reality: the reality of the image that the whole world, as requested, has been able to produce of itself; countries confessing something through their representation of what

they would like to be, for this unique and unrepeatable moment in the history of mankind in this year 2015.

And I would like to leaf through the pages again and talk them over with those who shared with me the spectacle of Expo 2015 – and also with those who were not there, and who will have to wait for the next opportunity.

Nigel Satō

31 October 2015

The trip



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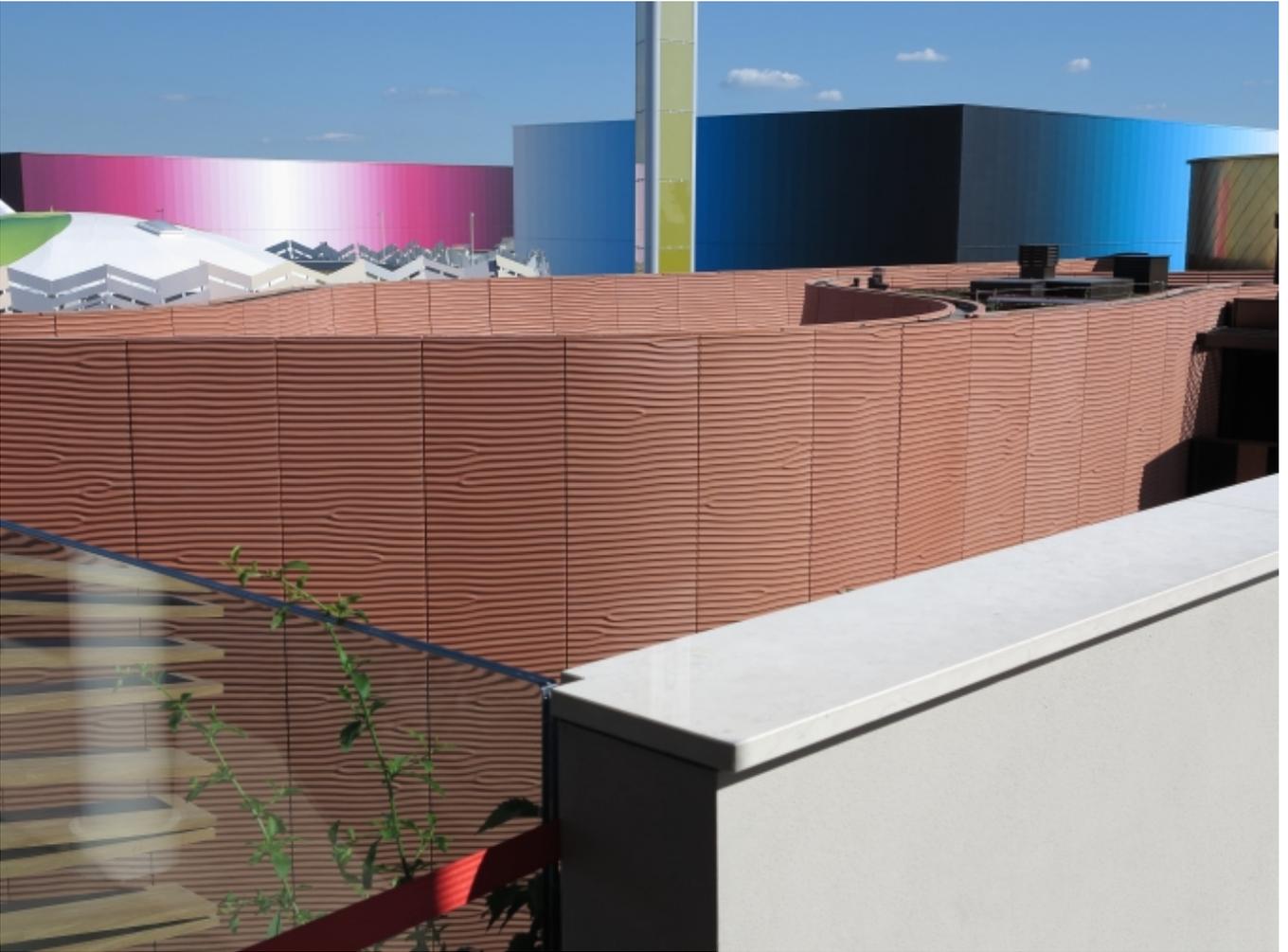
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EXPO Milano 2015: The journey of an ironic and unprejudiced observer, ready to grasp the nuances of the great spectacle in which the contemporary world has produced an unrepeatably and unique overall image of itself.

This selection of images taken by Nigel Satō at Expo 2015 comes out on the day after the end of the big event. Those who were at the Expo will find in this book a chance to relive the atmosphere of this unique and unrepeatably experience. Those who were not there will enjoy a late visit to the Expo. Both will better understand what they have absorbed through the huge media coverage of the event, stripped of the clichés thanks to the outsider's view provided by Nigel Satō.

This book isn't a catalog of the Expo, but rather an interpretation. Nigel Satō went round and round the Expo taking in the spectacle, giving little attention to the "official" theme of food, but seeing more what the show conveyed in and of itself, focusing on the beautiful, successful, and evocative sights on view amid the colorful juxtapositions and unique architectures. His work sometimes focuses on the official views, but more often juxtapositions created by chance, the details of the view sometimes falling into place in a moment of exhaustion, when in that overload of stimuli the fantasy takes on unforeseen and unexpected meanings. And the swarming spectacle of the audience, who mostly came to take everything very seriously, and paid great attention to all the exhibits.

In his photographs the Expo, designed to be light and undemanding, reveals itself through a state of intense concentration on the multifaceted spectacle that it offers.

Nigel Satō

Nigel Satō (London, 1975) was raised between England, Japan and Italy. In each of the three countries he studied the humanities and the arts, and through them he developed his special sensitivity to the protean complexity of contemporary humanity. In recent years he has put aside all other expressive forms to dedicate himself to meditation through photography, which he practices with long pilgrimages of silent observation. He lives in central Italy, and has contact only with his agents.