

# **Text Installation - Toranomon Hills Business Tower Shopping Area Entrance**

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As part of the Toranomon Hills development area, the Business Tower locates in a rather special area with very strong historical references and a mixture of old and new. Its name, its history and even its reflection of the Japanese culture in a broad level are quite unique that should all be considered when conceptualising a work for the entrance of the shopping area of the Business Tower.

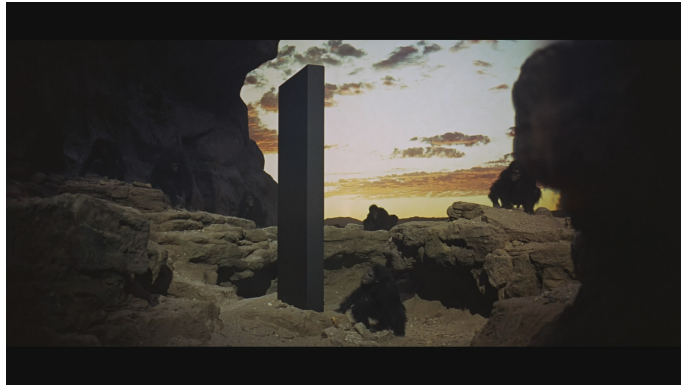
## **CONCEPT & REFERENCE**

### **Gate / Mon: The Beginning, The End & The Journey**

Gate serves as both an entrance and exit for entering or leaving from one space to another. It is a transitional space and area that marks the beginning of a new stage and journey but also states the end of the previous. It is a passage to the inside from outside or vice versa in the case of the shopping area, which is also a self-existent space with its own physicality and characteristics.

Located in the southern area of the historical Edo Castle and with the name of tiger attached to the gate and area, Toranomon inevitably reminds us the history of shōgun and samurai; the virtues of bravery, courage and the idea of improvement attached to the ideal image and the short but adventurous life of samurai. One can imagine the scenery of samurai passing through the Tiger Gate for a new journey or a return while water flowing underneath in the canal back in the old days. With its grandeur and monumental scale, the entrance of the Toranomon Hills Business Tower indirectly materialises the above virtues and ideas. And at the same time, its scale and shape share some similarities to the black monolith in Stanley Kubrick's film, 2001 Space Odyssey, that its occurrence often marks the beginning of a new phase and evolution of human being and civilizations.

Life and death issue is often being raised subtly with the existence of quite a number of shrines and cemeteries throughout the area along with the skyscrapers and modern buildings.



Still, 2001 Space Odyssey by Stanley Kubrick.

### **Pillar: Tree, Cherry Blossom & Mono No Aware**

Pillar has a strong connection to tree, which is also a metaphor for life, whether it is the Tree of Life in Christianity, the Bodhi Tree in Buddhism or cherry blossom in Japanese culture. The peak bloom of cherry blossom is always magnificent and glorious but ironically, it is also very short-lived. It blooms and fades dramatically that it is widely used as a metaphor for stating the shortness of life. The fallen cherry blossom particularly provokes a certain kind of the awareness of impermanence and transience of things and lives, which is also the idea of mono no aware in Japanese society and similar to the idea of Buddhism as well. Life is short but people often try to make the most out of it and to reach the highest as possible.

The straight and narrow pillar, as a symbol of tree, is also reminiscent of the lone pine tree in the city of Rikuzentakata after the tsunami in 2011. Though it eventually withered and died, the pine tree became a national symbol of striving for life after the disaster. Its image lasts and remains as a strong symbolic one.



Lone tree in Rikuzentakata, photo: Aflo/Barcroft Media



Rendering of Business Tower's Entrance

## Mirror / Reflection: Impermanence & The Floating World

By covering the pillar in the entrance space with semi-reflective stainless steel, it reflects the surrounding area, people and texts as if it captures and reveals the world as the floating world depicted in Ukiyo-e (more specifically, Hashira-e based on its long and narrow form.) And somehow, its shape and materiality also reminiscent of the sword used by samurai that reminds us of the fragility of life and brutality of death.

On the other hand, pillar acts like a bridge that links the Earth with the World above. With the mirror installed on the ceiling of the space, it creates another space and world right above, which also posts question on the authenticity and solidity of the world we are living in. Are we the one who dream of being a butterfly or actually it is the butterfly that dreams of being us living in this floating world as Zhuangzi asks?



Prints / hashira-e by Katsukawa Shunsho (L) 1764-1772, British Museum & Utagawa Hiroshige (R), n.d., Art Institute of Chicago.

No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man.

— Heraclitus

Heraclitus suggests that everything changes. We are not and will not be the same person in the next moment while there is also a similar idea, *ichi-go ichi-e*, in Japanese tea ceremony that reminds people to treasure every meeting and moment with the others as those are all once-in-a-lifetime experience and cannot be repeated. Life is short and death is unavoidable. We can only pass through the same gate once but not twice, just like life itself. Every moment, everything and every person we met become a unique and precious experience that it just happens once.

It is an impermanent and floating world, a world of sorrow and grief that is always in the state of flux and full of illusions, with no solid and permanent self exists as suggested in Buddhism's three marks of existence.

All are impermanent; All are unsatisfactory; All are not self.

## PROPOSED WORK

### Blow If You Will Float In The Wind



Image 1. View on the front, mock-up image of the proposed work.

Blow if you will  
Autumn wind. The flowers  
have all faded

— Gensen Mumon

Based on the location of the building and the above ideas, a text installation would be proposed to fully cover the glass surfaces of the entrance, with the ceiling and pillar covered with mirror and stainless steel to create reflection and the sense of highness and sublime.

Lines and fragments of texts flow and fall on the glass facades, with the pillar acts as the trunk, as if they are branches, leaves and petals that are blowing by the wind and are falling on the ground. The falling branches, leaves and petals; the reflective trunk, the floating world; the mirror ceiling, the sublime and the world above, all point to the uncertainty, fragility of life and to provoke a sense of withering of life, which, at the same time, reminds us to treasure every moment and chance we have when meeting the 'new' people and experience the 'new' things in the world of impermanence.

White, the colour used in the proposed work, is a noble colour that represents purity and cleanliness but it also denotes death and mourning. It is the colour of snow and winter that marks the end of a year, like clearing of all previous things and back to a blank page in the beginning.

### Text

Gensen Mumon, Matsuo Basho, Sen no Rikyu are some of the monks and people who write poems, particularly the farewell poem to life, to show their views on and attitudes towards life and death issue. Their poems and other philosophers' ideas such as Zhuangzi are some of the sources of texts used in the work, which are edited, fragmented and then incorporated into the image.

In order to create a certain distance with the content for avoiding direct confrontation and explicitness, English would be used as the sole language. The distance, in some ways, helps to create extra time for discovery and realisation, and at the same time, with the slightly broken sentences and phases, it also leaves more space for interpreting and playing with the texts.