



My Short-lived Advertising Career

For many years - until it closed - I held my annual exhibitions at the gallery in Shinjuku run by the Takano company. It was a nice enough place to show my work, but one of its most interesting features was the manager, Mr. Amano. Amano-san was a type that we rarely meet these days, a capital-G 'gentleman'. He had worked for the Takano company in various positions for many years, and by the time I came to meet him was already well past normal retirement age. But he was so devoted to his work - which to tell the truth, was inseparable from his life - that there was no question of leaving his position. And the depth of his knowledge and the breadth of his contacts were incredible; he knew everybody.

During the years that I held my exhibitions in his gallery, I handled most of the publicity and promotion by myself, but he did sometimes step in to assist when he felt that I wasn't getting good results. He would make a couple of phone calls, and presto, a couple of days later, we would see a story in a newspaper, or in would come an offer of a radio interview, or some other such help with my endeavours. On one particular occasion though, his assistance backfired ... I hope he won't mind if I tell you the story about the whiskey!

It happened around ten years ago; Amano-san was thinking about what he could do to help with publicity, and came up with the idea of contacting a friend of his, a man who had a regular advertising feature in a major newspaper. These ads were very simple, and always the same pattern - a photograph of the person being featured, along with their comment about the delights of a particular brand of whiskey. Amano-san made a phone call and arranged for the photographer to come down to the gallery to take my photograph for the next advertisement in the series.

I knew nothing about this plan, and the first I heard of it was when the man arrived, Amano-san introduced him to me, and they explained the project. For a minute or so I was a bit perplexed, and wasn't sure how to handle this situation. I certainly didn't want to cause Amano-san to 'lose face' with his friend, but ... there was no way that I could agree to this plan. So I tried to explain to the man, as politely as I could, that I was sorry, but I didn't drink S-brand whiskey, and couldn't appear in his advertisement.

I think he misunderstood me at first; "Oh, it doesn't matter; whether or not this is your favourite brand isn't really important." So I had to explain further, "No, it's not a question of which brand. You see, I don't drink whiskey at all. How can I possibly say something about how delicious it is?" But still he didn't see this as a problem. "Don't worry; we'll think of something to write. Just stand over here, so I can take the picture ..."

But I had to put my foot down; "Please, I'm sorry, but I just can't be part of your advertisement. I don't drink this stuff. I've even published a story somewhere that talks about my dislike of whiskey. What if some of your readers see that? What would they think of your product then?" That seemed to get to him. He stopped insisting that I cooperate with the plan, and a short time later he said good-bye and left the gallery. I was a bit afraid that Amano-san might have been upset with me, but as I mentioned, he is quite the gentleman; he deferred to my wishes without complaint, and the incident was over.

Should I have accepted the offer? After all, most of us these days don't actually believe much of what we see and hear in advertisements, do we. But I don't think that I really had much choice on this one; if I had accepted the offer, and got my picture in the newspaper holding a glass of whiskey and saying "Mmmmm, good!" my brother - who is a serious consumer of that product - would never have spoken to me again!

David Bull
Seseragi Studio
Nagabuchi 8-4-5 Ome City
Tokyo Japan 198-0052
<http://astoryaweek.com>