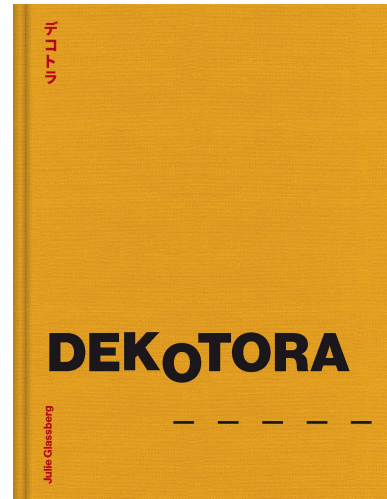


Press Release

Julie Glassberg
Dekotora



At first glance, it's a spectacle of vibrant colors and dazzlingly bright lights on extravagantly decorated trucks. Dekotora, short for “deko torakku” (i.e. decorated truck) is written off by mainstream Japanese society due to its association with “bad boys”. But beneath the flashy surface lies a world shrouded in mystery and poetry.

Dekotora first caught on in the late 1960s as a form of mobile advertising: a truck carrying fish from Hokkaido, for example, would sport a traditional painting showing its cargo and where it was from. Today, due to regulations prohibiting this form of decoration because of the disrepute of the Dekotora scene, these trucks are used only by a few small businesses, such as fish and flower delivery services.

Although to all appearances a relatively exclusive community, its members frequently host public events where they proudly show off their creations on wheels. Often, these gatherings are fundraisers for charitable causes, such as aiding victims of the 2011 earthquake, many of whom are still suffering from its consequences.

In a conversation with Japanese pop culture expert Kyoichi Tsuzuki, I gained a deeper understanding of Dekotora's cultural significance. Beyond its flashy exterior, Dekotora reflects a traditional Japanese aesthetic: like Japan's ornate hearses, tombs, temples and the sacred mikoshi palanquins used in Shinto festivals, it mirrors a penchant for elaborate decoration that is deeply ingrained in Japan's suburban and rural communities. It's a cultural echo of the past, of childhood memories that are rekindled by the sight of these garish juggernauts on the nation's highways and in iconic movies.

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