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## NY クール日本

*COOL JAPAN from New Yorkers' Viewpoints*

### Opening Smiling Umbrellas

On September 9 and 10, 50 umbrellas with printed smiling faces were opened for the 10th anniversary of 9/11 in New York. Koji Mizutani directed the Merry Project to deliver these smiling messages of peace and hope from around the world. The project started in 1999.

Beginning with the Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony, Mizutani's smiling umbrellas were seen mainly in disaster areas such as Indonesia's tsunami stricken area and at the 65th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

At the height of his career, Mizutani realized he had worn himself out physically and emotionally, and decided to do some-



thing to benefit our society and culture. Mizutani had an inspiration for this project when looking at a photo of a smiling young American girl. He then took photos of more than 30,000 smiling faces from 26 different countries.

Mizutani chose the word "merry" because it is broader and vaguer than happy. As public art, umbrellas enable participants to create their own space by doing something routine and ordinary. Mizutani emphasizes that con-

cepts and stories are more important than the design itself. "I don't know how long I will continue, but I do feel this is my mission," says Mizutani. The popular art director just celebrated his 60th birthday. Mizutani is taking photos of smiling faces, surrounded by smiling people, and giving many heartfelt smiles himself. (Kaoru Komi; Photo by Ryoichi Miura; Translated by Tomoko Isshiki)