

An Overview of Art Projects in Japan

A Society That Co-Creates with Art

Written by Sumiko Kumakura and The Art Project Research Group

Translated by Art Translators Collective



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Introduction

The following is a condensation of a collaborative research project conducted over five years, directed by Sumiko Kumakura, professor at Tokyo University of the Arts, under the aegis of the Tokyo Art Research Lab (a program run by Arts Council Tokyo).¹ The current report is intended to summarize the salient points of the research for an English-language audience who may be familiar with recent trends in socially engaged art and social practice but not as familiar with the corresponding scene in Japan.

The report is divided into four sections along with five columns which discuss certain topics and themes in further detail. “What are Art Projects?: History and Relationship to Local Areas” introduces the idea of the “art project,” which is the term that much socially engaged public art projects go by in Japan. Though art projects often include socially engaged and dialogic practices, the art project has some unique features that the section explains, as well as a particular history within the context of Japanese contemporary art.

“Case Studies from *Japan’s Art Projects: Their History and Present State, 1990-2012*” contains summaries of the research project report published in 2013, divided thematically, with one or two representative examples of each kind of project introduced. Readers should be aware that the research referenced in each of these case studies was collaborative; the findings that are discussed are the result of the work of the people named in the text.

In “Thinking about the Aesthetic and Social Value of Art Projects,” Kumakura undertakes a defense of the aesthetic and social value of art projects against some of the criticisms commonly lodged against them. While the critical establishment in Japan has been slow to engage seriously with art projects, this section suggests some avenues for future critical development.

In “Art Projects: Japan’s New Public Context for Contemporary Art,” contributing writer Justin Jesty, assistant professor at the University of Washington, offers his view on Japan’s art projects, discussing the implications and possibilities they hold both for contemporary art and society as a new form of public art.

One of the results of the original research project was to develop a concise definition of the art project, which is as follows:

Art projects are a co-creative form of artistic activity centered around contemporary art, that developed in various locations around Japan beginning in the 1990s. Not limited to the exhibition of artworks, art projects engage deeply with contemporary society, evolving in relation to the social conditions of a particular time and place. They are activities that generate new artistic and social contexts by seeding new contact points and social connections outside of pre-existing ones.

Art projects are generally characterized by the following:

1. Emphasis on the process of art-making and active disclosure of that process.
2. Site specificity, with reference to the social context of the site.
3. Sustained, long-term, and developing operations, with expectation of diverse ripple effects.
4. Collaboration among people of diverse social backgrounds and emphasis on communication to foster such collaboration.
5. Interest and engagement with social fields outside art.

1 The research project conducted three courses, “*Nihongata āto purojekuto no rekishi to genzai 1990-2010* [Japan’s art projects: their history and present state, 1990-2010]” (2010), “*Āto purojekuto no kenkyū* [Study of art projects]” (2011), and “*Nihongata āto purojekuto no rekishi to genzai II—teigi no kokoromi & 3.11 ikō no ugoki* [Japan’s art projects: their history and present state II—an attempt at definition and trends after 3.11]” (2012), which led to the publication of the report, *Nihongata āto purojekuto no rekishi to genzai 1990-2012* [Japan’s art projects: their history and present state, 1990-2012] (2013). A revised edition was later published in book form as *Āto purojekuto—Geijutsu to kyōsō suru shakai* [Art projects—a society that co-creates with art] (Tokyo: Suiyōsha, 2014).

What are Art Projects?

History and Relationship to Local Areas

by Sumiko Kumakura and Yūichirō Nagatsu



Yasuaki Igarashi, *Sora-Ami: Knitting the Sky*, 2013, Setouchi Triennale. Photo by Kimito Takahashi.

What are “Art Projects”?

Starting around 1990, initiatives referred to as “art projects” have become increasingly popular in Japan. Most basically, art projects are art-related initiatives held outside traditional museum and gallery spaces that differ from conventional exhibition formats that focus on displaying particular artists. Although numerous alternative spaces of differing scale have existed in Japan as a third place for art for some time, the concept of the art project is quite different from an alternative space in that it does not refer primarily to a single space or to the display of artworks, but implies activities taking place at a whole range of sites that emphasize the process of engaging with a wide range

of people.

More concretely, the term art project is used in relation to a broad spectrum of activities, from artists building organizations and holding exhibitions in disused spaces such as abandoned schools, to art festivals involving outdoor exhibitions and performances and activities that address community issues like social inclusion. But in all cases they involve forms of creative expression that reach out into contemporary society, commit to a particular social situation, and attempt to engender some transformation to that situation.

Participants in art projects are not limited to artists.

A hallmark of these activities is how their organizers often collaborate with local governments, universities, corporations, and civic groups to realize a project. Many art projects are held in locations such as schools, hospitals, and welfare facilities for the elderly and disabled. Similar kinds of endeavor can be seen in many countries worldwide but what is likely the most unique feature of Japan's art projects is the large number of art festivals held in smaller villages, towns, and across large rural areas. These activities form and intersect with varying art scenes, ranging from community-based projects organized by local amateurs, to exhibitions held by local professional artists showcasing their work, to projects that invite international contemporary artists to take part.

Among the projects in Japan that have attracted attention from art specialists, there are two distinctive features that are different from those in the West. First, there are few artworks and activities that assert clear political messages or socially critical views compared to socially engaged art. Although this nonpartisan slant is often criticized by Japanese art critics as compliance

with the views of sponsoring local governments, it in fact has more to do with the desire of project-oriented artists to form numerous social relations with people outside the field of art. Another characteristic of art projects in Japan is the lack of a clear objective among individual artworks and activities. Art festivals are often organized under the general mission of regional development (*chiiki shinkō*), which reflects the policies of local governments who usually sponsor such events, but individual artworks and activities that appear in those festivals do not necessarily present a clear social mission. This aspect of art projects will be discussed further in the section "Thinking About the Aesthetic and Social Value of Art Projects" (p.28).

Japan's art projects have provoked little critical discourse that might provide an analytical framework to understand the phenomenon of their rise and their attempt to engage the general public. The critical disengagement differs from the active attention to global developments showcased at the world's leading art museums and galleries in Japan.

The Prehistory of Art Projects

There are two major factors that affected the development of art projects: the context of society as it developed from the 1960s, and the way that the



Opening day of the "Yomiuri Indépendant" Exhibition held at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum in Ueno, March 2, 1961. Courtesy of *The Yomiuri Shimbun*.

culture of art has been received by Japanese society generally. In order to understand the development of art projects, it is necessary to examine the environment that artists have worked in in Japan since the 1960s.

Coinciding with developments internationally, Japan in the 1960s and 1970s saw a plethora of avant-garde, experimental expressions including happenings, outdoor performance, outdoor sculpture, and "indépendant" style exhibitions.¹ Despite the "miraculous" economic recovery after defeat in WWII, the 1960s in Japan was characterized by a wave of anti-establishment youth movements protesting the Japan-U.S. alliance and all that it symbolized. Sharing this same political momentum, artists pioneered numerous avant-garde activities in order to break free

¹ A nonjury, open-submission exhibition that adopted the protocols and attitude of the Salon des Indépendants held in Paris in 1884. Indépendant exhibitions were organized in reaction to the rigid, hierarchical system and exclusive policies of the fine-arts establishment and were a major feature of the post-1945 avant-garde landscape.



Theatrical Company Jōkyō-Gekijō (the precursor of Gekidan Karagumi), pitching a red tent in Hanazono Shrine in Shinjuku, Tokyo to give a guerrilla performance circa 1967. Photo scanned from *Jōkyō-Gekijō zenkiroku shashinshū Karagumi* [Complete records of Jōkyō-Gekijō: photographs of Karagumi] (Tokyo: Parco Publishing, 1984). Courtesy of Gekidan Karagumi. Photo by Toshihiro Asakura.

from the existing art establishment and critique the society around them.

In the 1980s, however, as Japanese culture as a whole became more consumerist amidst the economic growth brought about by the bubble economy, tastes shifted against experimental expression as being “too difficult.” Advertisements and other commercial expressions, which became increasingly refined during this time, occupied people’s interests. Japanese society entered an era dominated by well-made mass entertainment, exemplified by Japanese productions of Broadway musicals and Tokyo Disneyland, known for its polished service. With economic growth, more emphasis came to be placed on ease of understanding and enjoyment of beauty while more challenging things became less tolerated.

In many genres, artists who rejected the trend towards commercialization turned their critique towards their own fields, often lapsing into self-referential forms of work, resulting in even greater incongruence with society at large. As Japan developed into the world’s second largest economy, society gradually regained its pride and confidence after defeat in the war, but such development hardly created opportunities for young artists pursuing experimental practices. Many artists felt they were in a cul-de-sac with extremely limited opportunities to present their work. They sensed a contradiction in the

inverse relation that seemed to exist between economic development and the connection of society to art. Needless to say, many internationally-acclaimed artists have emerged from this period of economic growth, but their names remain largely unknown to mainstream Japanese society.

From the late 1980s to early 1990s, a wave of economic growth washed over provincial areas, driving the construction of numerous cultural facilities such as museums, concert halls, and theaters all across the country. However, the chasm between art and society remained unresolved even through the 1990s. The ones to reap the benefit of such institutional advances were not young artists, but local citizens who could use the facilities, and established artists whose works populated the galleries. Politicians during this decade urged public museums to purchase blue-chip impressionist paintings or Picassos rather than acquire works by young, emerging artists. Oblivious to the weak domestic contemporary art market, the affluent classes purchased more conservative and market-tested art forms such as Western painting (*yōga*), sculpture, and Japanese painting (*nihonga*), while younger generations directed their interest toward media and fan cultures.

Young, independent artists viewed the fine-art establishment (in which members are accepted into established art organizations upon recommendation by their teachers) and its exhibitions (judged by the art organizations’ arbiters) as a retrograde tradition. They were, however, also unable to see a future in self-organized *indépendant*-style exhibitions or solo shows held at rental galleries.² The circumstances forced artists to confront the question of where their artistic expression was destined: How long would they have to wait within the small, weak field of contemporary art to be noticed by the few curators and gallery owners specializing in the genre? Who, ultimately, were they making art for?

But it was around this time that grants and fundraising appeared in Japan’s art world, which began a shift towards supporting individual artists and small artist

² The rental gallery (*kashigarō*) system which emerged in the 1960s was a dominant force in the Japanese art scene, serving as an outlet for many avant-garde artists. The system allows artists to rent gallery space easily (usually for the duration of a week), though at high cost and with no support for installing work or curation.



Shiseido Gallery in 1920 (gallery founded in 1919).

groups. Until that time, it was standard for artists to hold self-organized exhibitions at rental galleries to try to gain recognition. However, such spaces charged high fees, placing a heavy financial burden on individual artists.

The year 1990 was a turning point, marked by the establishment of the nationally-run Japan Arts Council (Nihon Geijutsu Bunka Shinkōkai),³ which made artists eligible for governmental subsidies that had previously only been granted to cultural institutions. Moreover, following the collapse of the economic bubble, the interest in cultural funding that corporations had cultivated during the bubble era began to be directed toward younger artists who could be supported with smaller budgets. This further expanded opportunities for emerging artists to present their work. The establishment of the Association for Corporate Support of the Arts (Kigyō Mécénat Kyōgikai, or KMK)⁴ in the same year also led several companies to begin supporting young artists. One of the founding members of the KMK was cosmetics company Shiseido, which had a long history of supporting young artists through the Shiseido Gallery and an internal department dedicated to support of the arts. Other companies, such as Asahi Breweries, also began to offer support specifically to young artists.

Artists and arts organizers who saw potential for new forms of activity outside conventional cultural facilities emerged as a result of these shifts. What they encountered outside cultural facilities were the first

stirrings of a nascent desire for social change amidst the end of economic growth. In urban areas, the seeds of change began to grow in newly developed commercial spaces, largely underused after the collapse of the bubble, as well as in companies aware of the limitations of consumer culture who were seeking to try something new. In provincial areas outside major cities, it was in deserted interstices such as abandoned office buildings and desolate shopping streets created by rapid economic decline, spiraling depopulation, and aging. These artists and organizers began to seek new sites for artistic expression by and for themselves, outside the existing field of museums and theaters which had provided them with few opportunities. Gradually, more artists began to recognize the appeal of the process of working directly with actual communities to organize artistic activities and in previously unacknowledged sites which could be transformed into bases for activity just by gathering people to them.

An artist's motivation to start an art project might begin with a fairly straightforward idea that it would be interesting to install their artwork at a specific location. Until the 1980s, artists arguably sought spatial uniqueness in unconventional sites that could serve as stages for their works. Open-air exhibitions on beaches or dance performances at a former quarry are some examples. From the 1990s onward, by contrast, the interest appears more directed toward artistic intervention in the social context of a site. Artists began to shift from site-specific to community-specific works.

One pioneer of this shift is dancer Min Tanaka. Tanaka relocated his dance troupe, moving it from the city to an agricultural village in rural Yamanashi Prefecture, and led the launch of contemporary art and dance festival Art Camp Hakushū in 1988 together with art producer Kazue Kobata, who served as an adjunct curator at PS1 (now an affiliate of MoMA) in the 80s and 90s. The project's idea—that participants should do farm work in addition to creating artwork while in residence—was a major factor that determined

³ Japan Arts Council: <http://www.ntj.jac.go.jp/english.html>.

⁴ Association for Corporate Support of the Arts: <http://www.mecenat.or.jp/en/>.

its later development. As art historian Kenji Kajiya suggests, this event had many of the qualities of today's art projects, such as funding by corporations in major cities and participation from numerous volunteers.⁵ In this way, Art Camp Hakushū was clearly different in nature from prevailing artistic activities at the time, which were centered on artworks and interested in the site as a stage for works.



Rica Takashima, *Exhibition with a Large Order*, 1998. Ink and acrylic on canvas, tarpaulin and mixed media, 359 pieces, Museum City Fukuoka 1998. Installation at Canal City Hakata shopping mall.

Another example of a pioneering art project is Museum City Tenjin. Riding the tailwinds of the bubble economy, local artist Shingo Yamano and a group of collaborators launched the project in Fukuoka City in 1990 with financing from private corporations. The



Izumiwaku Project, 1994. Courtesy of Takashi Murakami.



Hakuna Taabu, *African Dance Workshop*, 1995, Artwork Mino.

project received a great deal of attention in the Japanese art world at the time for a refreshing approach which suggested a broad social perspective in its planning, managed as it was by supporters with a variety of positions and backgrounds both in the arts and the corporate world.

Artist Tadashi Kawamata can also not be overlooked in this discussion. Already well-known internationally for his highly ephemeral, large-scale projects, Kawamata began to organize co-creative projects around this time. In 1996, he began a project involving alcoholics and psychiatric patients in the Netherlands and also made work with the same participants at Sculpture Projects Münster in 1997. We might speculate that Kawamata's reference to his artworks as "projects" had a great influence on the Japanese art scene.

Other early examples of art projects include the Izumiwaku Project, a series of exhibitions organized by artist Takashi Murakami (not to be confused with the internationally famous contemporary artist whose work incorporates elements of pop art, anime, and *otaku* culture), which started in 1994 and continued for several years. Murakami, who worked as an art teacher at a Tokyo junior high school, invited young, fellow artists to participate in an exhibition utilizing the entire school facility during summer vacation. In the following summer, in 1995, artist Tsuyoshi Koishihara, who volunteered as head of the PTA at his son's elementary

⁵ Kajiya's activities in relation to art projects are further discussed in the section "Case Studies from *Japan's Art Projects: Their History and Present State, 1990-2012*" (p.14).

school in Okayama, organized an exhibition featuring young artists as part of the school's centennial anniversary called Artwork Mino.

The Great Hanshin Earthquake that hit the city of Kobe in 1995 and resulted in over six thousand deaths, strongly influenced the later development of art projects in Japan. Disaster relief activities by volunteers in badly hit areas drew much public attention, serving as an occasion to push for the enactment of a new NPO law. On the other hand, because artistic activities were thought to serve no practical purpose, many art-related events were canceled in the wake of the disaster, not only in areas directly affected by the earthquake but also in the wider Kansai region due to concern that they would seem insensitive. Was art completely inadequate to basic human needs? Was artistic activity only

permissible in civilized places during peaceful times? The Great Hanshin Earthquake caused these questions to become deeply engraved in the thinking of Japanese artists and helped stimulate interest in artistic activities that addressed social inclusion.

The Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011, which resulted in the most casualties of any earthquake in Japan post-WWII, elicited a very different response from the art world. Immediately after the disaster, innumerable websites were launched encouraging donations through charity art sales. The then-Commissioner of the Agency for Cultural Affairs called for cultural activities not to be canceled so long as safety was not at risk. Artists also flocked to affected areas. This active involvement might have been the result of artists' knowledge and actual experience of working in some of the art projects around the country that were already engaged with actual communities.⁶

Regional Art Projects

Today the term art project is used somewhat ambiguously to refer to a whole range of activities. Among the most high-profile are large-scale art projects, including an ever-increasing number of international art festivals organized by prefectures or large cities as a means to promote art tourism. Approximately ten such festivals exist in Japan and the

number is expected to increase. In the case of large-scale festivals held in major regional cities such as the Yokohama Triennale, Aichi Triennale, and the Sapporo International Art Festival, most of the exhibitions are limited to museums. Yet many of these also lead to long-term projects that put roots down in local areas outside of the museum context.

In festivals held in depopulated rural areas, on the other hand, such as the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale, Setouchi Triennale, Beppu Project, and Naka-Bosō International Art Festival Ichihara Art x Mix, the majority of artworks are exhibited in a variety of spaces in local towns and villages across a large geographical area. Compared to the urban festivals, artists participating in rural festivals show a stronger interest in unraveling the history and social context of the local area.

Mid-scale art projects include university-led projects, with students engaging in collaborative activities with the local community. Such examples



Shōdoshima Rural Kabuki. Courtesy of Setouchi Triennale.
Photo by Osamu Nakamura.

⁶ Art projects born out of the Great East Japan Earthquake are introduced in Chapter 9 of "Case Studies from Japan's Art Projects: Their History and Present State, 1990-2012" (p.25).

include the Hiroshima Art Project, Art Project Kemigawa Sōshinjo, the Toride Art Project, Hinonon Fiction, and Art Access Adachi: Downtown Senju—Connecting Through Sound Art, as well as those organized to reactivate community and outdoor life in empty city centers such as the Zerodate Art Project and the Breaker Project. There are also small-scale projects organized by individual artists, art NPOs, and local communities. As exemplified by this range, the term “art project” has been adopted to describe truly diverse forms of activity.

Although sites for art projects are multifarious, many utilize spaces outside existing cultural facilities (museums, galleries, concert halls, etc.) such as alternative spaces, the deserted downtown areas at the heart of many cities, traditional Japanese houses left vacant, empty shops, abandoned schools, and outdoor venues such as parks and fields. Of course, sites for art projects are not limited to vacant or deserted places. Projects can also be based in spaces running shops or cafés. The scale of project sites also varies, some covering areas that span several towns and villages, and some held in small, discrete areas, such as parks, where artworks are scattered around the premises. The common thread is the concurrent use of multiple sites which viewers navigate to see temporarily installed artworks at various locations.

It is important to note that many regional art projects are not entirely undertaken for the benefit of the local community. Although the project as a whole might have an overarching—though often vaguely stated—goal, such as building community or stimulating the local economy, all the participants do not equally share all of those goals. This brings us to the question of how art projects engage with society. The passion for engagement may be due to an interest, shared by both mainstream society and artists, in anticipating the formation of alternative channels of communication and engendering new kinds of activity outside of existing value systems. But it must also be pointed out that the conceptualization of social problems is rarely explicit or confrontational. Artist Hiroshi Fuji, an organizer of many important initiatives, advises participants to “focus on one’s



Ilya & Emilia Kabakov, *The Rice Field*, 2000, Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale.
Courtesy of Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale Executive Committee.
Photo by Osamu Nakamura.

unarticulated, vague sense of unease” during the planning stages of a project. Perhaps the journey of an art project begins by contemplating and exchanging opinions around that “something” which is not clearly good or bad but which cannot be left as is.

This tendency in art projects may also be related to an aversion to discussing politics in Japan and a desire to maintain an equivocal attitude toward political and civic movements. Needless to say, many active political and socio-civic movements do exist in Japan, but the participants in them remain a comparatively small segment of society. Rather than connecting with these more radical citizens, art projects aim to engage the majority of people whose social awareness is comparatively unformed. Art projects work with those who may hold a nebulously reformist attitude in order to explore the “unarticulated, vague sense of unease” within society. By deeply engaging with others through a process of making art, such projects might result in raising the awareness of this majority, but that is rarely stated as-such.

An important turning point for art projects was the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale organized by art director, Fram Kitagawa, which attracted over 160,000 visitors during its first iteration in 2000. At a time when contemporary art exhibitions struggled to gain financial support and when ten thousand visitors was considered a success for an art event, the phenomenal popularity of this art festival came as a surprise both to the art world and mainstream society.

The venue for the festival, the Echigo-Tsumari region of Niigata Prefecture, is a mountainous, rural area with heavy winter snowfall that faces serious population decline. Though lacking in notable historic sites or tourist attractions, the tiered rice paddies of the area offer visitors an idyllic, agricultural landscape. Visitors are able to rediscover a forgotten, archetypal Japanese landscape while re-encountering the country's turbulent hundred-year history of modernization through the region's experience of it. They are also prompted to contemplate the future—that of both the region and Japan—as the crisis of depopulation verges on community extinction.

With the exception of major cities, almost every region in Japan faces precipitous depopulation, birthrate decline, and aging, making it difficult to imagine a brighter future. In small towns with no universities, most young people leave for the big cities and rarely come back because there would be no jobs for them if they did. Younger generations accustomed to urban culture can find no attractive peer communities or activities in rural areas, leaving nothing but an association with stagnation and resignation. Rural society in Japan is on the verge of extinction, with instances across the country of villages with only a handful of elderly residents, or in extreme cases, only one.

The Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale began from an awareness of this impending problem and with the question of how the future of rural communities could be changed, even if only a little. In its early stages,



Volunteers making art work.
Courtesy of Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale Executive Committee.
Photo by Kazue Kawase.

however, the festival was met with complete indifference by local residents. One local attested that many of them intentionally ignored the event: “We knew about the festival but we felt that it wasn’t meant for us.” In such circumstances, the organization of festival volunteers named the *kohebi-tai* (literally “band of little snakes”), played a crucial role in forming a relationship with the local people. The presence of a few hundred young volunteers staying over long periods of time was a rarity in this depopulated region. These young people, working with genuine enthusiasm toward a goal with no particular financial benefit, generated sympathy among locals who began to feel that they should lend a hand. The locals were especially moved by the willingness of young volunteers to come back to the area unrelated to the art festival, to help in relief activities when the Niigata Chūetsu Earthquake hit the region in 2004, followed by heavy snowfall. This contributed to a major change in the local community's attitude. The locals did not necessarily understand contemporary art but could no longer ignore the presence of the young people hard at work in their villages.

The attitude of participating artists also changed. Initially, there were many cases in which internationally established artists came to install their work and then left. But artists gradually began to stay longer in the area and to involve locals in the production process by conducting interviews and other activities. People who had initially kept a wary distance gradually began to accept Japanese and foreign artists who repeatedly visited their homes requesting to speak to them and hear stories of the past as well as to ask them to make appearances in their work. Locals found pride in the fact that their exchange with artists served as inspiration for their works, which resulted in many local citizens becoming passionate interpreters, explaining the artist's production process to visitors.

The locals received compliments from visitors about their villages and towns, which they thought had no notable appeal, and saw the community regain its liveliness through interaction with a diverse range of people. The outgoing hospitality which resulted from this has now become a distinct characteristic of the



Ogijima Island, Setouchi Triennale. Photo by Osamu Nakamura.

area. Currently, in addition to businesses that sell local produce, elderly women offer their home-cooked specialties to express their warm welcome towards visitors. The desire on the part of the local community to show a kind of selfless hospitality (*omotenashi*) began to harmonize with the goals of the art festival.

The success of the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale and the Setouchi Triennale (2010-) instigated a slew of large-scale art festivals held by local governments across the country. Unlike their urban counterparts, many of these rural festivals take place over vast geographical spaces, usually requiring three to seven days to view in their entirety. Another hallmark of the events is that they are popular among the mainstream public as well as art fans. Attracting four hundred thousand (Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale) to one million (Setouchi Triennale) visitors, they have developed into a form of art tourism, garnering attention as a catalyst for local economic revitalization.

Furthermore, the phenomenon has reversed the situation in the early 1990s, when contemporary art proved significantly less popular because of its complexity. Artist Yayoi Kusama is a quintessential example of an artist who has now become a widely popular star, recognized by art fans as well as the mainstream public. From the opening of Benesse Art Site Naoshima, which led to the start of the Setouchi Triennale, many rural contemporary art museums far from Tokyo, such as the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa and the Towada Art Center in Aomori, have gained popularity among the mainstream public, attracting a wide demographic as

tourist destinations. Undoubtedly, the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale has contributed a great deal to this popular embrace of contemporary art.

However, activities that have economic impact on regions account for only a small proportion of art projects. The majority are small-scale undertakings organized by local citizens which have little to no economic impact. These activities are thought to engender new channels for communication within a locality, to rediscover the hidden values of a specific area, and to contribute to community-building. The locality is especially important for small-scale art projects specifically because they cannot expect festival-like crowds.

Artists today are more conscious of the social context underpinning an exhibition space, even when simply displaying work for exhibitions. Artists skilled in project organization, who have the ability to take characteristics of a local area into consideration and design initiatives that engage local and non-local participants, are highly sought after by various local organizations across the country (even small-scale projects). Unlike traditional forms of amateur cultural activities carried out primarily for the benefit of participants within a given, pre-existing community, these activities aspire to open communities to new participants. They might therefore be thought of as “community-aiming art.”



Yayoi Kusama, *Pumpkin*.
Courtesy of Benesse Art Site Naoshima.
Photo by Shigeo Anzai.

An Overview of Large-Scale Art Festivals in Japan

Among the various kinds of art projects to emerge over recent years, large-scale art festivals with attendance of over three hundred thousand have developed a particularly strong presence. Many of them are initiated by municipal and prefectural governments with the aim of revitalizing local areas, and the largest of them exhibits more than three hundred artworks by international and domestic artists across an area of seven hundred sixty square kilometers. These art festivals have become especially popular among a younger demographic for offering a cultural experience set in a typical Japanese rural landscape.

The festivals have also gained attention from the public as a means to stimulate rural economies and revitalize communities struggling with depopulation. In this column, we present the scale of such projects through data from two of the largest art festivals in Japan, the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale and the Setouchi Triennale, which are both organized by Sōichirō Fukutake (Chairman of the Board, Fukutake Foundation) serving as producer and Fram Kitagawa (Art Director) serving as director.

The Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale

The Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale is one of the largest art festivals in the world and has been held once every three years in the mountainous Echigo-Tsumari region of Niigata Prefecture since 2000. The sixth Triennale was held in 2015, open for fifty days from July 26 to September 13.

Overview of the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale 2012

Duration: July 29 - September 17, 2012

Location: Echigo-Tsumari Region, Niigata Prefecture (760 km²)

Organizer: Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale Executive Committee, which includes the Governor of Niigata Prefecture, Mayor of Tōkamachi City, and Mayor of Tsunan Town, among others.

Number of artworks: 367 (including 189 permanent works)

Number of participating villages: 102

Number of participating artists: 360, from more than 44 countries

Number of visitors: 488,848

Number of registered volunteers (*kohebitai*): 1,246

Budget: 490 million JPY

Economic impact within Niigata Prefecture: 4.65 billion JPY

Source: Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale 2012 Report
<http://www.city.tokamachi.niigata.jp/page/000028292.pdf> (Japanese only)

Setouchi Triennale

Setouchi Triennale is an international art festival held in the Seto Inland Sea and its islands since 2010.

Overview of Setouchi Triennale 2013 “An Art and Island Journey Through the Seasons on the Seto Inland Sea”

Duration: Spring: March 20 - April 21, 2013

Summer: July 20 - September 1, 2013

Autumn: October 5 - November 4, 2013

Location: Twelve islands in the Seto Inland Sea and the ports of Takamatsu and Uno

Organizer: Setouchi Triennale Executive Committee, which includes the Governor of Kagawa Prefecture and Mayor of Takamatsu City, among others.

Number of artworks: Approx. 200 (including permanent works)

Number of participating artists: 200, from 26 countries

Number of visitors: 1,070,368

Budget: 1.17 billion JPY

Economic impact within Kagawa Prefecture: 13.2 billion JPY

Source: Setouchi Triennale Report 2013
<http://setouchi-artfest.jp/news/post/3034/> (Japanese only)

Case Studies from *Japan's Art Projects: Their History and Present State, 1990-2012*

by The Art Project Research Group



Otomo Yoshihide, *Ensembles Parade 2011*. Courtesy of Art Tower Mito Contemporary Art Center. Photo by Kenji Ōtani.

This section will outline *Nihongata āto purojekuto no rekishi to genzai 1990-2012* [Japan's art projects: their history and present state, 1990-2012], a research report released online in 2013 by Sumiko Kumakura and two editors, Takuji Kikuchi and Yūichirō Nagatsu.¹ The Art Project Research Group was launched in 2010, with Kumakura as coordinator, to organize open lectures and study groups on the current state of art projects in Japan.² These events involved presentations of case studies and discussions, which

led to theorization. Inviting a diverse range of speakers from art project staff members who worked on site, to researchers in various fields such as aesthetics and sociology, these meetings unpacked the contemporary landscape of art projects. The research report is a compilation of those meetings. What follows below are summaries of Chapters 1-9 of the report, each of which featured a combination of interviews and discussions on the chapter topic.

¹ Downloadable in Japanese at http://www.tarl.jp/cat_output/cat_output_art/869.html.

Supervised by Sumiko Kumakura, planned and edited by Takuji Kikuchi, Yūichirō Nagatsu, and The Art Project Research Group. Published by the Tokyo Culture Creation Project (currently Arts Council Tokyo) of the Tokyo Metropolitan Foundation for History and Culture. A revised edition of the report was published as a book titled, *Āto purojekuto—Geijutsu to kyōsō suru shakai* [Art projects—a society that co-creates with art] (Tokyo: Suiyōsha, 2014).

² The open lectures and study groups (refer to footnote on p.2) were a program of Tokyo Art Research Lab, part of the Tokyo Culture Creation Project's Tokyo Art Point Project. (Through a merger in 2015, the Tokyo Culture Creation Project, organized by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government and the Tokyo Metropolitan Foundation for History and Culture, was re-established as Arts Council Tokyo.)

1. Universities and Art Projects: Hands-On Learning and Hubs for Local Communities

Contributors: Ken'ichi Nagata, Kenji Kajiya

Many art projects in Japan are implemented as part of the curriculum of university courses or as independent initiatives led by students and professors who organize them in collaboration with artists, local residents, citizen groups, and local governments in the towns and cities where a university is located. Universities began to take the initiative in organizing art projects in the late 1990s, but a major systemic reform implemented in 2003 involving the privatization of national universities accelerated this movement by introducing a third mission of “social contribution” to universities, in addition to the existing missions of “education” and “research.”

Recently, art projects have taken on multiple roles in the area of university education. They serve as a means for educating artists and art managers in art schools. They are also implemented as part of general education curricula, including cases where they are organized around practical education goals that address real-life situations. They are often the focus of student research projects. With “social contribution” added to national universities’ mission, opportunities have increased for them to engage with local communities through art. These efforts have led universities and their professors and students to serve as local hubs, contributing to regional revitalization and addressing issues that face communities outside metropolitan areas.

Art scholar Ken'ichi Nagata introduced a practical learning course titled “Creating Culture” while teaching at Chiba University. “Creating Culture” is a general education course launched at a university with no art courses or art department. He invited guest lecturers who, from the early 1990s, had pioneered new types of cultural activity both inside and outside the country, to organize projects with students. Based on this experience, Nagata launched Suburbia Tokyo, Hironon Fiction in 2008, after moving to Tokyo Metropolitan University, mainly with professors and students from

the newly established Art & Design Social System Program in the Department of Industrial Art (the department has since been reorganized). In a process that engaged the citizens of Hino, a suburban city in western Tokyo, the art project put together an exhibition of three groups of invited artists who created public, participatory works on the site of a former sericulture experiment station owned by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (the project has since ended).

Kenji Kajiya, an active art historian specializing in contemporary art, presented an overview of the Hiroshima Art Project at Hiroshima City University. Launched by artist Yukinori Yanagi, a professor in the university’s Faculty of Arts, the project consisted of exhibitions staged across the city and its surroundings. By making use of underused facilities, the project created opportunities for students and professional artists to present their work. After taking up a teaching post at the university in 2008, Kajiya managed the project’s operation with the aim of developing artistic talent capable of working in cooperation with local citizens, developing the neighborhood, and promoting arts and culture within Hiroshima.

University-led art projects take on a wide variety of roles, from those developed as part of the university’s



wah, *Train Runs in the Forest*, 2010, Hironon Fiction 2010.
Photo by Masahiro Hasunuma.



Outdoor Art Center PPy, Hiroshima Art Project 2010.

social contribution to those conceived from an educational standpoint as a way to train specialists such as aspiring artists and art managers in basic aspects of how art and society relate to each other through hands-on education. As in the case of

Nagata's courses at Chiba University, an art project incorporated into the general education curriculum was able to attract students from fields other than art, such as economics, law, and the social sciences (unfortunately Chiba University is the only example of such attempts). We can speculate that when students, who will be tomorrow's leaders in various fields, see the importance of art as something that goes beyond rationalism and has the power to transform people's values in ways that can lead to social change, they may become conscious of art's vital role in society. Art projects have much to offer universities: from the cultivation of young people with the flexibility and responsiveness to make innovations in the social architecture, to the development of non-autonomous forms of artistic expression that engage people from different backgrounds.

2. Alternative Spaces and Art Projects: New Developments in Realizing Sustainable Support Systems

Contributors: Nozomu Ogawa, Tsuneo Noda

Alternative spaces in Japan date back to the 1980s, but in recent years they have emerged as sites where community-engaged art projects are often based. Nozomu Ogawa has been managing Art Center Ongoing in Kichijōji, Tokyo since 2008. A renovated two-story traditional Japanese house with a total area of only eighty square meters, Ongoing houses a gallery that showcases works by up-and-coming artists; a café and bar as a place for exchange, with a variety of old and new art books available to read; and an information booth with sources on a wide range of artists compiled from Ongoing's own network.

Japan has hardly any sites that resemble art centers, like the Kunstverein in Germany that organize various art events directed towards local people. Sensing this lack, Ogawa established Ongoing single-handedly, holding his own self-organized exhibitions and events without relying on the conventional rental gallery system. While still a graduate student in art, Ogawa curated a series of five exhibitions held in venues such as abandoned schools, cafés,

restaurants, and old warehouses, and this served as the starting point for Ongoing. Building on this experience, he eventually realized his goal of opening an art center, something he had declared from the outset of the project. In addition to running the art



Art Center Ongoing

space, Ogawa has expanded his activities, organizing Teratotera, a project that takes place across a broad swath of western Tokyo.

Tsuneo Noda, an architect specializing in building renovation, launched the Travelers Project in Fukuoka. This project manages both the “hard” and “soft” side of their undertaking: not only renovating buildings but also attracting diverse ventures to fill those spaces. As one example, Konya 2023 used a renovated old residence-cum-tenant building built in 1965. Based on the concept of a “future multi-purpose building,” the project aimed for a site where all manner of occupation/business, age, nationality, temporality, and objective could “share residence.” The project not only conducts renovation planning, space management, and art direction, but also organizes diverse programming including exhibitions and events. In the past, it has organized summer education programs where tenants served as lecturers.³

The two spaces contrast in terms of their aims and management style, but we can see common threads in the way they are like living organisms, constantly developing, and in the importance they attach to generating new social systems through their activities. These projects are different from standard commercial galleries and alternative spaces, where organizers select artists from a curatorial standpoint: they place



Multi-purpose building of Konya 2023

value rather, on the fortuitous emergence of diverse activities from day-to-day interactions. The activities of these young leaders, still in their thirties, has served as an important guide in defining art projects, in terms of how people assemble around projects, how the relationality among participants should be designed, and finally, how to operate facilities which yield relations that bear unknown potentials.

3. Museums and Art Projects: Community Projects Initiated by Museums **Contributors: Yuu Takehisa, Meruro Washida**

There are approximately one hundred eighty public art museums in Japan, only a small percentage of which specialize in contemporary art. Chapter 3 introduces case studies of Japan's pioneering contemporary art museum, the Contemporary Art Gallery at Art Tower Mito, which opened in 1990, and one of the most high-profile of the newest generation of museums, the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, which opened in 2004. Located in mid-size cities with populations of roughly

270,000 (Mito) and 460,000 (Kanazawa) people, both museums are expanding the zone of their activity outside their facilities by collaborating with local governments and civic groups. It is common for museums and theaters to hold community projects within their facilities, but there are few institutions that extend their programs outside their own walls, collaborating with other organizations in the local area to stimulate independent cultural activities. The two institutions in this case study are rare examples of

³ *Konya-archives 2008-2013*, a documentation of Konya 2023 comprised of eighty interviews of people involved in the project as well as an overview of past activities, was published online in 2013. (Downloadable at <http://www.dlmarket.jp/products/detail/267625>, Japanese only.)

museums that are actively doing that.

Art Tower Mito opened in 1990 as the first municipal arts complex in Japan, comprised of a contemporary art gallery, concert hall, and theater, with the aim of showcasing cutting-edge works of an international level. The understanding of the research group was that the museum's sophisticated programming, comprised mainly of events curated by contemporary art curators—unique at a time when public museums' main function was to rent exhibition spaces for local amateurs—struggled to be understood by the local citizens. Among Mito's facilities, especially the Contemporary Art Gallery seemed to have a weak relationship with local communities.

In her contribution to the research group, Yuu Takehisa, curator at the Contemporary Art Gallery at Art Tower Mito, introduced art projects orchestrated by the museum. The Art Gallery proposed launching CAFE in Mito in 2002, one of the reasons of its establishment possibly being to resolve the chasm between the museum and the local people. The project staged a group exhibition with works exhibited throughout the local area. This eventually evolved into the establishment of an autonomous organization, the MeToo Promotion Office (a play on the word "Mito," the name indicating that anyone could become an organizer), which aimed to serve as a bridge between Mito residents and art. MeToo has collaborated with the Contemporary Art Gallery to organize programs



Atelier Bow-Wow, *Iki-Iki Machiya Project*, 2008, Kanazawa Art Platform 2008 -To Create our Own Place by Ourselves-.
 Photo by Atelier Bow-Wow.

such as an Otomo Yoshihide exhibition that included an open-participation music parade called the "Ensembles Parade." MeToo continues its activities while exploring different frameworks for cooperation with local retailer associations, economic organizations, and unions.

The 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art opened in the heart of Kanazawa in 2004—over a decade after Art Tower Mito. Compared to Art

Tower Mito, the museum's identity is strongly tied to its relationship with the local community. Along with showcasing top class contemporary art, the museum placed outreach at the core of its mission, conducting programs right from its opening that target local citizens, such as elementary school students in Kanazawa City.

Curator Meruro Washida, discussed past projects orchestrated by the museum. Kanazawa Art Platform, an outreach initiative launched in 2008, holds numerous programs both inside and outside the museum facility. These include exhibitions in venues such as the local shopping districts and vacant houses; workshops and events in community centers, elementary schools, and group homes; and programs utilizing underused buildings as bases for activity.

Although today both museums actively collaborate with organizations and initiatives in their local communities to contribute to building a cultural network, the discussion between the curators from the two museums revealed slightly different standpoints towards community-based projects. Takehisa, at the time, still seemed to face the challenge of resolving the discord with local citizens sown in the span of twelve years since the museum's opening. By contrast, Washida stated that he felt nothing unusual or special about museums taking their programs to the local area and seeking cooperation from the local community. The contrast in their views seemed to mirror the



Kyōta Takahashi, *dreamseed 2008- Kanazawa*, Kanazawa Art Platform 2008 -To Create our Own Place by Ourselves-.
 Courtesy of 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa.
 Photo by Yasushi Ichikawa.



Otomo Yoshihide, *Ensembles Parade*, 2009.
Courtesy of Art Tower Mito Contemporary Art Center. Photo by Kenji Ōtani.

different institutional legacies, reflecting the gap between the eras in which the two museums were established. What particularly stood out from the discussion was the sense of a difficult struggle to build community relations being behind Takehisa's emphasis on off-museum projects.

Takehisa also pointed out that one of the roles of

museums is to maintain a platform that offers the opportunity for local people to overcome perceived differences in social station so that they can proactively initiate activities of their own design. Museum-led programs that engage the local community have spawned multiple small-scale initiatives independent from the museums in both Mito and Kanazawa. Iki-Iki-Sō in Kanazawa is one such example. This traditional Japanese house, originally rented by an artist, was transformed into a weekly gathering place that attracted a diverse range of visitors. These social gatherings developed into CAAK (Center for Art & Architecture, Kanazawa), a project that traverses genres of art and architecture. It became clear in the session that such bases for small-scale, self-initiated activities that have sprung up around the museum, function as gathering places for artists invited by the museum and people from the community interested in creative activity.

4. Urban Renewal and Art Projects: Building Social Capital Contributors: Jun'ya Yamaide, Yuri Yoshida

Many art projects approach the challenges of declining rural areas and regional cities by taking on regional revitalization. Art projects that take the historical context of a local region/area into consideration can contribute to building new communities by serving as intermediaries among existing social groups, facilitating the formation of new relationships.

Jun'ya Yamaide introduced the Beppu Project, of which he is founder and producer. Beppu City in Ōita Prefecture was at its economic peak during Japan's period of rapid development, when it served as a large-scale hot springs destination. However, there was a drastic change of fortune after the collapse of the economic bubble in the 1990s, and Beppu has seen many hotels, inns, and other facilities forced to close down. As a result, vacant shops and underused buildings now dominate the hot spring district, which still retains its old-town architecture. Yamaide, an artist

who had returned to the area from an artist-in-residence overseas, established the NPO Beppu Project in 2005, with plans to launch an international art festival in the area. However, because the idea of an international art festival received little buy-in from the local people, he started a range of small-scale projects to rediscover the appeal of the town. One of these efforts was the "platform" scheme which began with small-budget renovations of vacant shops in the city center, spaces which then became staging points for a string of new activities, including a community café that provided employment opportunities for the disabled, managed under the auspices of the local university's Department of Social Welfare; a hub to revive a local traditional craft that was fast disappearing, operated by an NPO promoting bamboo crafts; a hotel conceived of as an artwork itself which offers accommodation to visitors; and an artist-in-residence facility available to domestic and



Yūsuke Asai, *The indoor forest / Clay auspicious animal*, 2009, Chōjamachi Project 2009. Photo by Kō Yamada.

international artists.

Beppu Project currently runs an extremely broad range of operations, from staging an international art festival, to creating new platforms for civic cultural activities, to running a mail-order business promoting fresh local produce and food products as well as local crafts. Such activities have stimulated younger generations to open small retail shops in the old-town area which has further revitalized the city.

Yamaide's ability to take action, along with his imagination in coming up with ideas that can upend existing social systems, is a major attribute of the "artist/producer," which is an important figure in the landscape of Japan's art projects. Beppu Project has kept developing during its initial ten years, its activities now extending outside Beppu City. The Ōita Prefectural Government and Yamaide planned and held the Kunisaki Art Festival in a remote area of the prefecture that still retains many archeological sites. The activities in Beppu have also spawned art projects in other cities around Ōita.

Yuri Yoshida a former assistant curator for the Aichi Triennale introduced the Chōjamachi Project, part of the Aichi Triennale in 2010, which she was responsible for. The Triennale is a large-scale international art festival held in Nagoya, Aichi Prefecture, and the Chōjamachi Project took place at one of its four main venues. While the three other venues included museums and theaters, this project was staged in the Chōjamachi neighborhood—a historic textile wholesaling district located right in the heart of Nagoya

City. It had seen a marked increase in the number of vacant buildings as the textile industry declined. After the burst of the bubble economy, the number of textile companies in the area dropped by half. With little opportunity for younger generations in the local wholesalers' association to lead local activities, a sense of stagnation had set in within the local community. Moreover, there was little interaction between the wholesalers and the new businesses that entered the area after other wholesalers closed.

Within this context, artists organized many projects that sought civic participation. Seeing that the Triennale had no commercial intent, the elders among the wholesale businesses decided to designate younger managers to work together with the art festival staff. By individually approaching each of the younger business owners, Yoshida was given permission to use the vacant spaces of their buildings free of rent to display artworks. As one example, the artist duo KOSUGE1-16, launched an updated local parade with the cooperation of the younger business owners, recreating the town's large, wheeled festival float which was destroyed during the war. This event became a symbolic turning point for the neighborhood.

The parade initiated by KOSUGE1-16 is still held annually, attracting participants from outside the textile district as well. Also, artists creating works that feature the townspeople has yielded new frameworks for participation and cooperation. Attitudes among the townspeople, many of whom were initially skeptical



Kitchen Dance from "Dance Journey through Beppu city community center—Open Room", 2009. Courtesy of Beppu Contemporary Art Festival "Mixed Bathing World" Committee. Photo by Takashi Kubo.

towards art, changed after the Triennale. The local community independently established the Chōjamachi Art Annual Organizing Committee, without relying on the local government, an expression of their

determination to employ art as a means to revitalize the neighborhood. The project also resulted in volunteers from outside the area moving into the district, which has created new communities.

5. Art Project Staff: The Different Faces of Local Participants

Contributors: Orie Takano (Sustainable Art Project Himming), Takuma Ishiyama (Zerodate Art Project), Yasue Habara (Toride Art Project), Keita Arai (Kitamoto Vitamin), Masato Nakamura



KOSUGE1-16, *Dondoko! Kyodai Kami-zumo Kitamoto-basho Senshūroku* [Dondoko! giant paper sumo Kitamoto tournament, final day], 2009.

Volunteers have a central role in art projects that are founded on cooperation and participation. For large-scale art festivals, volunteers usually work as guides, ticket-checkers, or security for the artworks during the festival season. However, for small- and mid-scale projects, many local volunteers take part in the projects as organizers. As one examines the unique characteristics and local color of each project, it becomes apparent that the social changes or the new community that volunteers in a project aspire toward varies widely.

For Chapter 5, young project organizers from four different locations around Japan were invited to introduce their projects as case studies. In their presentations, each speaker discussed the characteristics of the local citizens who take part in the projects, either as operating staff or as participants in the art activities the projects entail. The organizers also exchanged opinions on the necessary qualities for project staffers and the challenges of project management.

Located in a renovated fishing net warehouse in the

remote fishing town of Himi City, Toyama Prefecture, Sustainable Art Project Himming runs programs that involve many elderly male participants of varying occupations such as fishermen and carpenters. The Zerodate Art Project, initiated by creators from Ōdate City, Akita Prefecture, serves as a creative community for young people who have returned to their hometown from Tokyo where they originally moved in search of jobs—following a trajectory known as the “U-turn.” The Toride Art Project is a collaboration between the Tokyo University of the Arts and the small Tokyo satellite city of Toride in Ibaraki Prefecture, which hosts one of the university’s campuses. The project is a well-known example of a university-led art project, attracting participants from white-collar families of all ages, including retired businessmen and housewives who have finished raising their children. Kitamoto Vitamin, based in Kitamoto City, Saitama Prefecture, is run by young staff members who majored in art or design.

Sustainable Art Project Himming and the Zerodate Art Project were both produced by Masato Nakamura



Ken'yū Oku+Yūsuke Suzuki, *Ino Danchi Ashiyu Project*, 2008, Toride Art Project 2008.



Himming Art Center

who represented Japan in the Venice Biennale in 2001. Nakamura reported that the appeal of art projects is that “they have large doorways and drawers that can absorb different values and then return them again to the local area.” He emphasized that building a sustainable system that can develop while maintaining a balance between staff, systems, and finances was of greatest importance to the longevity of rural art projects. Among the projects introduced in the session, Kitamoto Vitamin has since ended. The other projects, however, have attained nonprofit status in the course of their development. The goal of establishing a non-profit in order to establish a resilient management

system can be considered one of the major characteristic features of these small-scale projects.

Regarding the challenges of running a project, the staff members noted that the daily work required is comparable to starting a new business—long hours with unstable pay, which is low if there is any at all. In the meantime, managers must always remain attentive to those working around them, including other staff, volunteers, local community members, local officials, and artists in order to maintain high levels of motivation. Although two of the four contributors have since left their projects, the remaining staff members continue to work on these projects, drawn to the appeal of working with a specific community and being able to feel when their activities begin to have some impact within it.



Zerodate Art Project Center in 2010 (reopened as an art gallery in May 2015).

6. Art Projects and Society: Social Inclusion and Art Contributors: Nobu Amenomori, Kazumitsu Kawamoto

In recent years, art has been increasingly involved in social arenas outside the field of art as it is usually understood, engaging with, among others, the homeless, immigrants, the disabled, and the elderly, in locations such as hospitals and welfare facilities. As in other countries, art projects that aim to build an inclusive society where diverse values can coexist are also beginning to emerge in Japan. In many cases, projects of this type offer opportunities to accept people’s differences through art or provide a hint as to how art can engage with society. The most noteworthy of such cases in Japan are projects carried out in areas where many homeless people and day laborers

live, known as *doiyagai*, or “flophouse districts.” This chapter introduced two contrasting cases. Nobu



Hiroshi Fuji, *Experiment in the Town: Dekopori “Toysaurus”*, 2009, Zetsumetsukigu Fūkei [Endangered landscape project] (organized by the Breaker Project).



Kotobuki Candle Night, 2010, Kotobuki Creative Action.
Photo by Ken Katō.

Amenomori leads the Breaker Project, which started as a cultural venture initiated by the Osaka City Government in 2003. Concerned with the isolation of contemporary art from society, Amenomori sought to rebuild an effective relationship between the two through an art project. As opposed to the Cocoroom, a project that directly engages the *doiyagai* residents in a neighboring area, Amenomori's project is more concerned with cultivating an arts audience and a new site for expression, as well as attracting visitors unfamiliar with the area by installing artworks in it.

Kazumitsu Kawamoto is the organizer of Kotobuki Creative Action in the Kotobuki neighborhood of Yokohama. Kawamoto is a clear example of an organizer who employs art as a tool for social inclusion. He commented: "Kotobuki is a place where those who have lost touch with society come to live as their final abode, their final destination in life. These

people are not necessarily homeless but hopeless. The theme of our activities is to explore how these people can reconnect with society, that is, to see whether social inclusion is possible through art." The project's approach contrasts to that of the Breaker Project in that it does not display works for the enjoyment of outside audiences but places emphasis on the possibility of enabling those who lead solitary lives to enjoy art on a daily basis and, through it, regain a sense of life being worthwhile.

The two art projects, which differ in terms of goals and approach also form different relationships with local governments and engage different types of residents. However, both projects are similar in that they are founded on the fundamental question of whether communities can be transformed through art. In a discussion of how projects should engage with a given locality and whether art risks exploiting marginal groups, Kawamoto pointed out the need to depart from existing notions of art: "Rather than imposing the meaning of art on people from a place of authority, what's more important is a willingness to work with them." Amenomori added to this argument by commenting, "The aim of our project is to create an environment where artists can survive. At the same time, that will enable people to accept different values, leading to the formation of a society where everyone can live and belong. Moreover, the project aims to transform the local area into a site for artistic experimentation which will generate interest toward the area among the public."

7. Companies and Art Projects: Why Companies Support Art Projects

Contributors: Taneo Katō, Tomoko Kitamura

Today, corporate support of the arts is not limited to funding but can include various forms such as access to human resources, corporate infrastructure, and networking platforms. In 1990, the Association for Corporate Support of the Arts (*Kigyō Mécénat Kyōgikai*, or KMK) was established as an intermediary organization to promote corporate cultural support and conduct research and study on the field. What is the motivation for companies to support the arts? One

context that can be highlighted is the sense that companies must move in tandem with the emergence of new social values, as the social values of twentieth-century mass consumerism are becoming unsustainable.

Taneo Katō, currently the Executive Director of KMK, led the Department of Corporate Cultural Activities inside the global beer company, Asahi Group Holdings, from 1990 up to his retirement in 2013. The



Rubber Duck Project, 2009, Aqua Metropolis Osaka 2009.
Photo by Hiromitsu Morimoto.

company has had a major impact on the field of art projects through a support program called the Asahi Art Festival. The Festival is designed to grant intermediary support to new projects in the startup phase of their activities, in the form of seed money grants, corporate endorsement to show credible backing, and a platform for project organizers to network and exchange information.

Asahi initially adopted a mainstream approach to cultural support as carried out by many companies in Japan, including operation of self-owned cultural facilities and sponsorship of cultural events. Katō explained that after realizing the limits of this approach he became interested in focusing on activities that only a national-scale company could realize. He pointed out that, “Regardless of the location and contents of the projects that received support, these initiatives still remained as independent ‘dots’ strewn across the country.” By weaving together a nationwide network of seed projects, Asahi Art Festival built a new platform that encourages citizen-led, small-scale activities, and contributes to their validation.

Tomoko Kitamura is responsible for CSR at

Chishima Real Estate Co. Ltd., in Osaka. Chishima is a small-scale, privately held, local real estate company with a hundred-year history. With the economic downturn, vacant spaces proliferated in the land owned by the company. As a way to address the situation, the company promotes art projects in order to redevelop local areas through culture. By making use of underused assets—converting a former shipyard into an art facility or offering vacant small-scale real estate to artists at an affordable rent—Chishima is transforming much of its property in the areas around the shipyard into an artistic hub. An important characteristic of these art projects is that they are closely connected with Chishima’s main business, enhancing local real estate value. Chishima’s case is an example of a win-win relationship between art projects and the main activities of the organizing company. Kitamura reported that art has contributed to increasing corporate value: “Through art, the company is now recognized as unique for the role it is playing in revitalizing Osaka.”

As seen in both cases, the two companies are not simply providing financial support to projects but are also expanding their activities to build a future social model through art support in a way that coincides with the company’s main interests.



Group photo from Asahi Arts Festival The World Network Project, 2011.
Minamisanriku Town, Miyagi Prefecture.

8. Artists and Art Projects: The Good and the Bad of Large-Scale Art Festivals Held in Depopulated Regions

Contributors: Tadashi Kawamata, Hiroshi Fuji

The Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale (2000-) and the Setouchi Triennale (2010-) are quintessential examples

of large-scale art festivals that became milestones for art projects in Japan, and boast an unparalleled

number of visitors for contemporary art events.⁴ These art festivals have sparked a phenomenon that could be called “art tourism” and have contributed to community revitalization and benefited local economies in rural areas that face serious depopulation. As a result of these successes, art projects have garnered attention as an effective strategy for regional revitalization and tourism.

For this chapter, we invited two artists, Tadashi Kawamata and Hiroshi Fuji, who have both taken part in the two festivals. Kawamata, a renowned artist currently based in France, was highly critical of large-scale art festivals and art projects in general for their tendency toward emphasizing popularity. He pointed out that large-scale art festivals succeed in attracting visitors by promoting the locations where they are staged, but in turn compromise the quality of the artworks and the concept of the event. As a result, experiencing the scenery and exploring an unfamiliar location become the main objective of the event rather than the art, which according to Kawamata, is merely an added value to the experience. Kawamata also maintained that because of the festivals’ site-specificity, both the artists who create the work and visitors who view it have begun to conform to a standardized pattern, indicating that these exhibitions have reached a dead-end. Kawamata emphasized that against this backdrop, artists needed to explore how the homogeneity can be reversed.

Kawamata launched the CIAN project in 2009 to collect, preserve, and publicly display documents pertaining to art projects held across Japan.⁵ CIAN asserts the need to investigate the true purpose of art projects, which emerge only to quickly disappear, and serves as a warning to other projects to avoid falling into the trap of being merely a means for regional revitalization.

Hiroshi Fuji is currently the Director of Towada Art Center and a Professor at Akita University of Art. He is one of the first generation of younger activists strongly



Tadashi Kawamata, *Cosmology of Yusuke Nakahara*, 2012-, Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale 2012.
Courtesy of Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale Executive Committee.
Photo by Osamu Nakamura.

influenced by Kawamata. Fuji likened his work to that of a computer operating system⁶—a platform that facilitates different creative activities undertaken by local people (in this analogy, the equivalent of computer applications). His OS operates in a way that encourages and motivates his participants to take action by their own initiative and links those activities to society. Fuji recalled that the early works of Kawamata in the 1980s gave him the impression of an installation artist who “drew in space.” Fuji observed that the artistic activities of Japanese artists influenced by Kawamata shifted from transforming the function of “space” to “place” in the 1990s, and developed further in the 2000s towards changing “systems of participation.”

The discussion involving Kawamata and Fuji brought to light differences in their thinking about art projects. Fuji, holding a positive view, saw potential in art projects, drawing attention to how, in a pre-consumer civilization, people executed diverse skills as a means of daily life, and arguing that reviving those skills could lead to the rediscovery of people’s ability

4 Refer to Column 1 (p.12).

5 CIAN (Center for Interlocal Art Network), launched in 2009, is one of the hub facilities of the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale, and aims to build an archive of creative activities including documents of Kawamata’s own projects and a collection of maquettes of works exhibited in the Triennale.

6 Refer to Column 3 (p.32) for more information on Fuji’s work and his concept of the “operating system art.”



Hiroshi Fuji, *House of Hachijuro Fujishima*, 2010, Setouchi Triennale 2010.
 Photo by Osamu Nakamura.

to create for themselves. Fuji also claimed that participating in art projects could enable participants to adopt new perspectives and acquire a new understanding of social conditions. Fuji, who has conducted numerous sustainable projects throughout Japan, increasingly seeks possibilities of artistic expression in social relations. On the opposite side, Kawamata held that art tourism was to blame for rendering art projects superficial. He expressed a

desire to pursue artistic work aloof from the moment of presenting work to an audience, as a way to avoid being caught up in the art project boom. Kawamata, who has organized participatory projects on an international level, gives the impression that he is trying to escape the danger of his projects being sucked up by the trend of art festivals.

Kawamata and Fuji, representing different generations of artists, appeared to have contrasting approaches toward artistic authorship. Kawamata is the artist who first proposed the “project” as an artistic concept, and there are many people who have participated in his work both inside and outside Japan. But due to their highly sculptural form, his works are often, ultimately, labeled as “Work by Tadashi Kawamata” and assimilated into the art world. In a contrary fashion, Fuji, who refers to his artistic practices as “OS-style art,” invents systems which, as the name suggests, allow open use. Fuji’s willingness to abandon authorship can be considered closer to the mainstream of art projects in Japan than Kawamata’s position.

9. Trends After the 3.11 Earthquake: Art Projects Confronting Affected Areas of the Tōhoku Region

Contributors: Risei Satō, Otomo Yoshihide, Kimura Toshirō Jinjin, Yoshitaka Mōri

The earthquake of unprecedented scale that struck the Tōhoku region on March 11, 2011 and the tsunami and nuclear power plant meltdown that ensued, devastated a large area of the country. Four years have passed since the disaster, yet reconstruction measures have shown little progress in many places, and the effects of the tsunami continue to cast a dark shadow on Tōhoku. The last chapter of the research project report is a summary of an open discussion held in the year following the earthquake, which introduced art projects in the affected areas.

The Tokyo Art Point Project program officer, Risei

Satō, discussed his views on the activities of Art Support Tohoku-Tokyo,⁷ musician Otomo Yoshihide introduced Project Fukushima!, artist Kimura Toshirō Jinjin considered his “Nodate” project, and sociologist Yoshitaka Mōri shared his thoughts on the theme “Art after 3.11.” Satō, Otomo, and Kimura, who discussed art projects in the affected areas, all pointed out that the disaster exposed existing community divides while creating new ones.⁸ All three shared their attempts to transcend the chasms existing within and between communities through art.

Risei Satō pointed out that although the disaster

⁷ Art Support Tohoku-Tokyo was launched in July 2011, targeting three prefectures affected by the earthquake: Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima. The project works with local organizations and coordinators to launch and organize cultural programs such as symposiums, workshops, and residencies, and aims to provide support to make those programs sustainable.

⁸ Specifically, Otomo pointed out examples of things that could sow discord among the people of Fukushima: whether one was from the area or not, whether one had stayed behind or evacuated, or whether one had received compensation or not.

itself did not directly influence art projects per se, the disaster possibly served to highlight their approaches and merits. Conflicts and frictions along various “borders” often ended up obstructing reconstruction efforts in the region, but Satō maintained that art enabled the “creation of alternative communication channels” that could cross such borders. The earthquake resulted in a rapid cascade of issues that impacted local communities, such as exodus, industrial stagnation, and unemployment. He asserted that recovery from the earthquake is “not simply to restore ‘normal life’ as it was before the disaster but to re-design society anew in light of the possibilities the earthquake made visible.”

Project Fukushima!, initiated and promoted by Otomo Yoshihide, among others, was launched by people both inside and outside Fukushima Prefecture as a crucial challenge in the wake of the earthquake: “What can we do to transform ‘Fukushima’ into something positive?”⁹ The organizers aimed to resolve divides between people by devising a project that gathered people to Fukushima from Tokyo. They were able to put on a music festival with over ten thousand attendees by enlisting the help of experts to evaluate and publicize the level of radioactive contamination at the music festival site. The approach demonstrated a principle of action post-meltdown, where citizens could develop their own understanding of the situation, consider different solutions, and do something about



Festival Fukushima! Synchronized Worldwide Events, August 15, 2011.



Fukushima! O-furoshiki, 2011. Photo by Hikaru Fujii.

it. The project also claimed that the role of the artist is to create diverse arenas that include participants of different opinions and standpoints in a flexible and consistent way, and to realize a platform that can bring them all together in ways that complement each other or while affording conflict. Otomo stated, “What is happening now is not just a local issue specific to Fukushima but a universal problem that mankind must resolve in the future,” pointing out the need to confront and consider all of the major social systems that created the situation in Fukushima.

Kimura Toshirō Jinjin conducted his outdoor ceramics workshop entitled “Nodate” in Ōtsuchi, Iwate Prefecture, which was severely damaged by the tsunami.¹⁰ The artist reported how the preparatory process for the workshop highlighted divides among the organizing staff members, such as local earthquake survivors vs. outside volunteers and residents in temporary housing vs. residents in homes that withstood the disaster. However, the dialogue necessitated by the project gradually enabled communication between individuals, overcoming the divisions among their standpoints. The discussion reconfirmed that the healing properties of art executed by artists showing or performing their works was possibly not enough to bring down social divides caused by stereotypes, and that creating a platform with the collaboration and support from local people

9 Besides music festivals, Project Fukushima! organizes an ongoing program of events including poetry and music workshops, study groups on radiation, webcasting, and music streaming.

10 The project involves Kimura visiting various locations across Japan with a hand-pulled cart loaded with a tea ceremony kit and tools for making ceramics, including a kiln, unglazed ceramics, and glaze. Participants are situated outdoors, giving them a clear view of the area while they make and glaze their own tea bowls and then drink from them after they have been fired on the spot in the kiln, using a method known as *raku-yaki*.

was of major importance.

Referencing Walter Benjamin's "The Author as Producer" in *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, Yoshitaka Mōri postulated a theory of art of the



Kimura Toshirō Jinjin, *Nodate*, 2012. Sakuragi Town, Ōtsuchi.

present. He drew parallels between the 3.11 catastrophe and the angel of history, gazing fixedly upon the debris, and also between the "storm blowing from Paradise" and the amnesia toward the catastrophe forced upon people by today's media. Mōri said, "The role of today's artists is coming to resemble that of the angel of history who commits to observing the pile of wreckage while being pushed ahead by strong winds," and asserted that the implications of new artistic approaches lie in how they can re-problematize all the issues pertaining to the nuclear meltdown, which existing media and art institutions have failed to fully capture. Mōri mentioned Project Fukushima! as an example of this new approach, one that offers a glimpse of the role of the artist of the future.

List of Projects

The following is a list of projects introduced in the chapters of *Nihongata āto purojekuto no rekishi to genzai 1990-2012* [Japan's art projects: their history and present state, 1990-2012] (2013).

- 1 Creating Culture (General Learning Course at Chiba University, 1992-Present) / Chiba City, Chiba Prefecture

 Suburbia Tokyo Project, Hinson Fiction (2008-2010) / Hino City, Tokyo
<http://www.comp.sd.tmu.ac.jp/artsystem/hinsonon/project.html> (Japanese only)

 Hiroshima Art Project (2007-2010) / Hiroshima City, Hiroshima Prefecture
<http://hiroshima-ap.jpn.org/web/index.html> (Japanese only)
- 2 Art Center Ongoing (2008-Present) / Musashino City, Tokyo
<http://www.ongoing.jp/en/index.php> (English)

 Travelers Project (2005-Present) / Fukuoka City, Fukuoka Prefecture
<http://www.travelers-project.info/eng/top/> (English)
- 3 Art Tower Mito Contemporary Art Center (1990-Present) / Mito City, Ibaraki Prefecture
http://arttowermito.or.jp/gallery_en/gallery01.html (English)

 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa (2004-Present) / Kanazawa City, Kagawa Prefecture
<https://www.kanazawa21.jp/en/> (English)
- 4 Beppu Project (2005-Present) / Beppu City, Ōita Prefecture
<http://www.beppuproject.com/english/> (English)

 Aichi Triennale (2010-Present) / Nagoya City, Aichi Prefecture
<http://aichitriennale.jp/english/index.html> (English)
- 5 Sustainable Art Project Himming (2003-Present) / Himi City, Toyoma Prefecture
<http://himming.jp/> (Japanese only)

 Zerodate Art Project (2007-Present) / Ōdate City, Akita Prefecture
<http://www.zero-date.org/> (Japanese only)
- 6 Toride Art Project (1999-Present) / Toride City, Ibaraki Prefecture
<http://www.toride-ap.gr.jp/en/> (English)

 Kitamoto Vitamin (2008-2012) / Kitamoto City, Saitama Prefecture
- 7 Breaker Project (2003-Present) / Osaka City, Osaka Prefecture
<http://breakerproject.net/english/> (English)

 KOTOBUKI Creative Action (2008-Present) / Yokohama City, Kanagawa Prefecture
<http://creativeaction.jp/> (Japanese only)
- 8 Asahi Art Festival (Asahi Breweries, Ltd.)
<http://www.asahi-artfes.net/english/> (English)

 Creative Center OSAKA, Kitakagaya Creative Village Project, and the Rubber Duck Project (Chishima Real Estate Co. Ltd.) / Osaka City, Osaka Prefecture
<http://www.chishimatochi.com/english/solution/regional/> (English)
- 9 Tadashi Kawamata (1953-)
<http://www.tk-onthetable.com/index.html> (English)

 Hiroshi Fuji (1960-)
<http://geco.jp/> (Japanese only)
- 10 Art Support Tohoku-Tokyo (2011-Present) / Iwate Prefecture, Miyagi Prefecture, and Fukushima Prefecture
<http://asttr.jp/> (Japanese only)

 Project Fukushima! (2012-Present) / Fukushima Prefecture
<http://www.pj-fukushima.jp/en/> (English)

 Kimura Toshirō Jinjin, *Nodate* (1995-Present) / Ōtsuchi, Iwate Prefecture

The above links have been last accessed on October 6, 2015.

Thinking About the Aesthetic and Social Value of Art Projects

by Sumiko Kumakura



Two girls proposed an art museum for their ideal town after their homes had been wiped out by the 3.11 earthquake and tsunami.
Jun Kitazawa, *Mytown Market*, 2011-. Photo by Yuji Itō.

As discussed up to this point, many art projects in Japan take on aspects of community art or are held as events in which local citizens—non-artists—participate in creating artwork. They are designed to involve people in provincial areas who are marginalized by mainstream society in many ways. In other words, many art projects include works that have no distinct artwork or author, something that can be problematic from the perspective of modernist aesthetics. For this reason, art projects in Japan have been ignored or treated with dismissive ridicule for many years within the fields of art, art history, and art criticism. The critical failure comes mainly in the form of wholesale

dismissal, as when critics or historians simply assume that there is no art in art projects. When critiques are put forth, they often argue that works created through participation fail as artworks because they lack artistic quality. Indeed, such skepticism has become inseparable from art projects in Japan; they are constantly called into question regarding issues such as whether entertaining local people is enough, whether enjoyment alone can validate artistic value, what art is, and who decides. If art projects in Japan have some significance in spite of all this doubt, what would it be? In this segment, we will discuss the value that art projects create from several perspectives.

Departure from a Normative Definition of the Artwork

Skepticism Regarding Authorship

Of course, art projects are not devoid of artworks. Art festivals often feature conventional works, namely large-scale installations and both temporary and permanent works installed in public spaces that have been created by individual artists. Anyone would see these as works of art with little reservation. At the same time, these festivals also include projects where the artwork and author are not clearly defined, or that consist entirely of participatory workshops.

The underlying premise of the assumption that there is no art in art projects is that an artwork created by a group of amateurs cannot withstand criticism. There is also the concern that by being exploited as tools for local revitalization, artists or art itself will lose their autonomy. These concerns among art specialists are understandable considering the idea, established as a norm of modernism dating from the 19th century's "art for art's sake," that the artwork is defined as something created from inception to completion by the individual artist, along with the overriding priority placed on artistic autonomy. Moreover, the artworks appearing in art projects that cater to the interests of local governments appear to be only superficially take on the avant-garde techniques of artists from the 1960s and 1970s.

As a result of this attitude, almost no critical discourse on the aesthetics of art practices in the context of art projects has developed, even though the practices themselves emerged in the 1990s. This situation continued into the 2000s even after large-scale art exhibitions became part of the art project scene. The dismissal of art projects by the mainstream art world is to some degree parallel with the situation in the West where similar forms of art were undervalued until the concept of socially engaged art began to describe and establish them. However, as discussed later in the section, since art projects have grown to an extent that they can no longer be ignored, criticism



Jun Kitazawa, *Living Room*, 2010-.

has now begun to engage them more seriously.

Despite the indifference and criticism, many artists have been working to challenge the notion of the artwork and author in a variety of ways in the context of art projects. Numerous projects, like Hiroshi Fujii's "OS-style" art and Jun Kitazawa's work, intentionally ignore the idea of autonomy, placing less value on authorship and the stereotypical artwork.

From Talent to Co-creation

In this report, we described creative activities which place value on relations between people and the process leading up to a project as "co-creative." Traditional artistic thought takes artists to be people possessing a level of talent well above that of the ordinary individual. Co-creative art by contrast, places more emphasis on creativity, an attribute inherent in everyone. Art projects encourage individuals to manifest the creativity that anyone possesses in ways they haven't experienced before. The aggregation of this creativity has the potential to develop into something larger than what a single individual can produce. Collaboration, frequently used to describe creative activities involving multiple participants, often entails a one-way relationship centering on the artist (such as non-artists lending things or providing labor to the artist). Conversely, co-creative art involves

Case Studies of Co-Creative Projects 1 Jun Kitazawa's *Sun Self Hotel*

Sun Self Hotel takes place in Toride, Ibaraki Prefecture, a satellite suburb of Tokyo which developed in the 1970s and 1980s, with a population of a hundred thousand. The event is part of the Toride Art Project. Twice a year, *Sun Self Hotel* accepts guests to stay in an empty unit of an apartment complex, reimagined as a hotel. Local volunteers from the area play the role of the hotel staff, preparing hand-made amenities and home-cooked meals to welcome guests. After check-in, the guests are taken on a tour of the premises of the apartment complex with a cart equipped with a solar panel and a battery. The solar energy is used both to light the hotel room and also a “sun” consisting of a yellow balloon equipped with an LED light bulb, which is illuminated for the “Ceremony of the Night Sun,” where the guests, hotel staff, residents of the apartment complex, and participants from the area spend a sociable evening.

Jun Kitazawa, a young artist still in his twenties, stated that in response to the 3.11 earthquake and the nuclear meltdown that followed, he started to ponder how people could better come to terms with nature, and came up with the idea of people creating an element of nature with their own hands. Indeed, the most notable event of *Sun Self Hotel* is when the sun is pulled up into the sky in the evening and illuminates the apartment complex. This sun, a purposeless artifact for the hotel, is the only element of the project that resembles an art object. Even then, it is

the hotel staff who make the preparations to suspend it. The idea of the sun as well as the overall framework of the project is the only part of it that was conceived by Kitazawa. The actual service is planned and performed by the hotel staff and Kitazawa chooses not to intervene in their creative process. After selecting guests from a group of applicants, the staff spend two months in preparation, consulting the guests on their needs during their stay. Thirty-odd hotel staff of widely diverse backgrounds who come to the project as something outside their daily routine, then let their ideas run freely about how best to manage each stay. *Sun Self Hotel* is a form of co-creative artistic expression, created as specific individuals work together to create an experience for a specific audience.

Dramaturge Kaku Nagashima, a pioneering figure in postdramatic theater, pointed out that the project was like a play, with the hotel staff playing the leading role. Initially, the guests are unsure of how to position themselves in response to the hotel service, which is overloaded with the imagination of the hotel staff. The staging of the event, however, envelops them in a way that forces them to take some kind of role in the “performance,” a feature which may well be seen as akin to postdramatic theater.



Jun Kitazawa, *Sun Self Hotel*, 2012-. Photo by Yuji Itō.



Jun Kitazawa, *Sun Self Hotel*, 2012-. Photo by Yuji Itō.

individuals coming together to create something beyond what a single individual would be capable of producing, in terms of the diversity of ideas and perspectives involved.

Jun Kitazawa and Hiroshi Fuji, whose works are featured in Columns 2 and 3, are representative examples of artists who specialize in co-creative art. For example, the most distinctive aspect of Kitazawa as an artist is that he avoids giving directions to participants and is adept at stimulating discussion among people while remaining patient in overseeing the process. He continuously encourages plainspoken imagination among participants so that they take the initiative in liberating themselves toward a slightly out-of-the-ordinary fantasy—a process that differs from participants following the instructions of artists.

In The Art Project Research Group's publication summarized in the previous section, sociologist Yoshitaka Mōri argued, "Instead of heroically doing what has previously not been done before, what will become more important is a form of art that can create

alternative outcomes through careful observation of present conditions."¹ As Mōri suggests, it might be necessary for artists undertaking participatory projects to be able to patiently observe a community until a way of thinking naturally takes hold among them that affirms their view of the world can change when they act and exercise their creativity.

However as curator Meruro Washida, among others, have pointedly criticized, we must not overlook the pitfalls of "exploiting" the creativity of local citizens or leaning toward "fascist" tendencies.² A demonstration of creativity by local citizens can easily turn into a form of labor if it is simply assimilated into the work of an artist. Also, there is the danger of projects creating a stifling atmosphere of compulsory participation and of participants uncritically embracing art as an established value, rather than as something open to change. Yoshio Shirakawa has also suggested that imposing a system of values that leads to ostracism if not complied with can easily devolve into a fascism of values.³

Trends and Cultural Background of Art Project Research in Japan

Art projects in Japan occupy a slightly different position from socially engaged art or relational art. Relational art considers social relations as the subject of representation, while what is typically considered socially engaged art considers the capabilities and energy of its participants as a form of expression, placing emphasis on the political and calling for direct discussion of social issues. Art projects differ from these two forms in their use of a more moderate approach. Participants are invited to partake in creative tasks using their hands, for instance, and this ongoing

task generates new channels of communication between people and keeps the project going. In Japan, what people hope art projects can achieve is to undo constraints entrenched in existing communities, dissolve inherited social relations, bring new appeal to a particular area by establishing new social contexts which did not exist prior to the project, and aid people in discovering a sense of purpose in their lives. This has led to active discussion of art projects in fields outside of art history and aesthetics such as sociology, cultural economics, cultural policy, urban planning,

1 Kumakura, Sumiko (Sv.). (2013). *Nihongata āto purojekuto no rekishi to genzai 1990-2012* [Japan's art projects: their history and present state, 1990-2012] (Kikuchi, Takuji & Nagatsu, Yūichirō, Eds.). Tokyo: Tokyo Metropolitan Foundation for History and Culture, Tokyo Culture Creation Project (currently Arts Council Tokyo), Chapter 9, 9-18.

2 Washida, Meruro. (2009). "Āto purojekuto no seijigaku" [The politics of art projects]. In Kawaguchi, Yukiya (Ed.). *Tenji no seijigaku* [The politics of exhibitions]. Tokyo: Suiseisha, 237-253.

3 Shirakawa, Yoshio. (2010). *Bijutsukan-dōbutsuen-seishinka-shisetsu* [Art museums-zoos- psychiatric facilities]. Tokyo: Suiseisha.

public administration, and education.⁴

Social Capital

Among these, one area that is particularly well-researched is the question of the social capital that art projects develop. For example, Takayuki Yoshida's research draws on the example of the Chōjamachi Project that was part of the 2010 Aichi Triennale to

elucidate the implications of art projects and the concerns of the artists involved in them regarding the idea of social capital.⁵

Art projects can activate pre-existing forms of bridging social capital, but they also form new bridging social capital by connecting existing communities within a particular locality. While conventional forms of urban redevelopment are almost always infiltrated by

Column 3

Case Studies of Co-Creative Projects 2 Hiroshi Fuji's OS Art, *Kaekko Bazaar*

Held across Japan as well as abroad, *Kaekko Bazaar* is a workshop that allows children to have fun playing shopkeeper and customer, exchanging toys and other things, using an international children's currency called *kaeru* points. The mascot for the workshop is a frog, a play on words in Japanese, where the word *kaeru* means both "to exchange," and "frog." Children come to the venue with unwanted toys, books, and accessories which are assessed by child bankers at the Children's Bank and exchanged for *kaeru* points. The assessed prices are displayed on each item and from there they are moved to the appropriate shop. Participants can browse the shops and buy previously owned items with their *kaeru* points. There are also shops that hold workshops and issue *kaeru* points for participation.

Kaekko Bazaar is a representative example of Hiroshi Fuji's practice, which moves away from artwork as an expression of the individual artist, to see art in the act of creating situations where various participants are able to develop their own expressions by their own initiative. Fuji calls these activities "OS (operating system) art." Just as various applications run on a computer operating system, *Kaekko Bazaar* serves as a platform that organizers can use to run different workshops. Fuji's work functions as an OS: a platform that spurs creative activities.

In *Kaekko Bazaar*, children who initially take part as customers can also receive *kaeru* points by working as

staff. It is designed so that shoppers can switch roles to become staff or workshop facilitators. In this way, Fuji's OS triggers unexpected creative experiences for participating children.

Based on the system of the *Kaekko Bazaar*, Fuji also created a disaster drill workshop *Iza! Kaeru Kyaraban* (Hey! Froggie Caravan!) with the non-profit organization Plus Arts. Created after the Great Hanshin Earthquake in 1995, the project seeks to enliven disaster training and to engage participants from different generations. Many art workshops relating to disaster prevention are held at a *Kaekko Bazaar* venue where participants receive *kaeru* points for participating.



Hiroshi Fuji, *Kaekko Bazaar*, 2004, 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa.

4 In Japan, scholarly organizations conducting research on art projects include The Japan Association for Arts Management (Nihon Āto Manējimento Gakkai), The Japan Association for Cultural Policy Research (Nihon Bunka Seisaku Gakkai), The Japan Association for Cultural Economics (Bunka Keizai Gakkai), The Japan Sociological Society (Nihon Shakai Gakkai), and The Japan Association for Urban Sociology (Toshi Shakai Gakkai), as well as some in the field of architecture.

5 Yoshida, Takayuki. (2013). *Toshigata geijutsusai no keiei seisaku: Aichi Torienāle wo jirei ni* [Management policies in urban art festivals: the case of the Aichi Triennale]. PhD diss., Tokyo University of the Arts.

economic agendas that inevitably highlight stark differences between communities that will stand to gain or lose, Yoshida argues that art projects have the potential to produce explosive effects in establishing new norms and trust—characteristic aspects of bridging social capital—when employed as part of bottom-up, local revitalization, precisely because art is ultimately not connected to economic purposes or any other practical purpose (although with the caveat that such projects often fail to deliver sustained effects). This form of art, therefore, has the potential to create new social relations that get beyond economic and political divisions.

Perspectives from Cultural Anthropology

Cultural anthropology offers another perspective that should be considered when thinking about the cultural context of art project research in Japan. Here we will touch on two concepts: marginal art and *matsuri* festivals.

In 1956, critic Shunsuke Tsurumi introduced a new concept—marginal art (*genkai geijutsu*)—into the field of cultural anthropology. In addition to fine art, created

by art specialists and appreciated by those with specialized knowledge, and popular art, created by specialists and appreciated by the general public, Tsurumi coined and promoted a third realm of art rooted in everyday life and common cultural practices, produced and appreciated by people in their everyday context. Japanese people have a long history of enjoying finely produced handicraft and this can still be seen in local customs in rural areas. In this way, the desire to partake in creative expression within the realm of everyday life is very much a part of Japanese



KOSUGE1-16, *Katai Dashi* [Hard festival float], 2010, Aichi Triennale 2010. Photo by Ryōsuke Ishida.

Column 4

The Theory of Social Capital

The idea of social capital derives from the theory of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who developed three classifications for the kinds of capital available to the individual: cultural, economic, and social. More recently, American political scientist Robert Putnam has pointed out that characteristics of social organizations such as trust, norms, and networks facilitate active cooperation, generating social capital that improves the functioning of society. Putnam further divided social capital into two categories: bonding and bridging. Marked by exclusivity and homogeneity, bonding social capital is based on intrasocial relations that generate reciprocity only valid within a specific group. Common examples include circles formed around hobbies, sports clubs, and self-governed

local organizations. Bridging social capital, meanwhile, creates links among instances of bonding social capital and seeks coordination on a wider scale. It is characterized by broad reciprocity, with an emphasis on social tolerance and diversity. In *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (2000), Putnam stated, "...art is especially useful in transcending conventional social barriers," though he did not discuss in detail what he meant by this claim (p.411). Numerous studies on art projects and social capital have appeared recently in Japan in fields such as cultural economics, municipal engineering, and civics education.

society. This was pointed out by Tsurumi long before art projects existed.

The concept of marginal art has drawn renewed attention in art project research and, in some cases, has influenced the way art projects have been carried out.⁶ For example, the Kiriko Project in Minamisanriku-chō, Miyagi Prefecture, has produced high-quality paper cutout works by making use of the skills which have been passed from generation to generation in the local area. Marginal art can be considered something that stands between what is created by the talent of artists and the creativity of non-artists. Though not at the same level as the expression of professional artists, it clearly exceeds the creativity of typical reproductive work.

In contrast, there are also activities such as traditional festivals, that exist outside of regular social structures. Daily life in traditional village society can result in a sense of stagnation and dwindling vitality, but extraordinary events, like annual festivals, serve as an interruption to everyday life. Numerous traditional festivals, referred to as *matsuri*, that often involve the worshiping of a local deity, continue at various scales throughout Japan today.

In a thesis analyzing his own work, Jun Kitazawa focuses on the necessity of *matsuri* festivals, developing an interesting theory that adopts the well-



AAF Program, Minami-sanriku Fukkō Kiriko Festival, Minami-sanriku Town, Miyagi Prefecture, 2012.

used concepts of liminality and *communitas* proposed by Victor Turner.⁷ In this thesis, Kitazawa analyzes three of his representative projects: *My Town Market*, an event held several times a year, where 3.11 refugees residing in temporary housing organize attractions such as shops and cultural facilities to create an ideal future city; *Living Room*, where local residents bartered unwanted articles at an underused shop inside an apartment complex and then organized events based on those articles; and *Sun Self Hotel*, introduced in further depth in Column 2 (p.30). All three projects involved people who responded to Kitazawa's call for participants and came together to brainstorm, make proposals, and implement ideas—a process which required a great deal of preparation and daily commitment. Kitazawa claims that these public events held a few times a year, along with the process of preparing for them, destabilized pre-constituted roles within a community resulting in a temporary realization of *communitas*, a form of solidarity different from the existing, structured community.

Anthropological studies have traditionally observed such aspects in a community's rite of passage rituals. Thought to produce catharsis from the pent-up frustration of traditional, rigid community life, this liminal state in which rigorous societal roles are temporarily dissolved is referred to as liminality. In his own practice, Kitazawa attempts to catalyze such conditions, creating *communitas* by leading participants to a state of liminality through an aesthetic experience that emerges from the process of individuals seeking connection with others through various creative acts. The out-of-the-ordinary aspect of Kitazawa's work is the opposite of Tsurumi's marginal art located in everyday acts. Kitazawa claims that art in art projects is not something undertaken for the sake of either society or art. Rather, it opens us up to an alternative social landscape and enables ephemeral opportunities for new channels of communication that would otherwise not occur in ordinary life.

⁶ Refer to Column 5 on next page.

⁷ Kitazawa, Jun. (2014). "*Mōhitotsu no nichijō*" wo umidasu ato purojekuto ni kansuru kenkyū [Study of art projects as a vehicle for producing an alternative form of daily life]. PhD diss., Tokyo University of the Arts.

Musician and founding member of Project Fukushima!, Otomo Yoshihide among many others have pointed out the strong resemblance between the role of art projects and *matsuri* festivals. But are art projects really interchangeable with festivals?

With the exception of large-scale *matsuri* festivals, traditional and religious festivals are generally held in small communities occupying an area of no more than a few blocks, providing little opportunity for

cooperation with neighboring communities. Such festivals are by nature closed to outsiders, such as non-residents or newcomers with no previous participation in the festival. They are also traditionally male-dominated. In contrast, the aforementioned Kiriko Project was launched predominantly by young women and has drawn attention to creating opportunities for foreign-born wives (*gaikokujin-zuma*) in the Tōhoku region to open their own stage for

Column 5

Marginal Art and Art Projects

Ren Fukuzumi is an active art critic who has spearheaded a number of critical and practice-based experiments in an effort to apply philosopher Shunsuke Tsurumi's concept of marginal art (*genkai geijutsu*) in the context of art projects and contemporary art, updating Tsurumi's concept in the process. According to Fukuzumi, the two salient characteristics of the genre are its "primitiveness," or its lack of refinement, which encompass a wide range of expressive modes from contemporary art, to folk art, to street culture, calligraphy, and dance, and its emphasis on the people behind the work rather than the art. Exploring this concept in the context of art projects provokes questions about what art is and who decides.

Since Autumn 2012, Fukuzumi has been organizing a series of exhibitions titled "Marginal Art in Satoyama" at Matsudai Noh Butai in Echigo-Tsumari, which feature a selection of both professional and non-professional artists. The 2014 exhibition in the series, which featured contemporary artists and their amateur-artist parents or children, was subtitled "Relational Aesthetics," a title that clearly references Nicolas Bourriaud's relational aesthetics. The exhibition showcased the work of three contemporary artists and their amateur-artist parents or children, whose creative output cannot easily be called art. One of the participants, for example, was Jun'ichi Nishio (father of artist Yoshinari Nishio) who creates miniature F1 circuits and actively uploads videos of them to his YouTube channel. Fukuzumi opened the introduction to the 2014 exhibition with the confrontational statement, "Which work, by the parent or the child, is marginal art and which

is contemporary art? The extent to which we sense absurdity at trying to give a precise answer to that question corresponds to the extent that the parent-child relationship is not only to be inscribed upon, but actually enmeshed in, the relationship between marginal art and contemporary art. What kind of art will emerge with that awareness?"

In the 2015 installment of the series titled "Selected 100 Marginal Arts of Today," Fukuzumi brought together works of over thirty participants of diverse backgrounds such as a traditional Japanese flower arranger (*kadōka*), former painter of film advertisement boards, security guard, dancer, and local elderly citizens from Tōkamachi City, Niigata Prefecture.



In the 2014 installment of the "Marginal Art in Satoyama" exhibition series, Jun'ichi Nishio's son, artist Yoshinari Nishio showcased works from his *Familial Uniform* series where he reproduced family photos from decades before by creating the same clothes from the original picture and re-shooting the image at the same place with the same family.

activity and through it form new social relations. Compared to traditional *matsuri*, art projects are more open and allow people other than the established leaders of a local community to assume a central role in the events, which gives them the potential to become a new vehicle of liminality.



Opening of Festival Fukushima! 2012, August 15, 2012. Photo by Osamu Kikuchi.

Local People as Evaluators of Art Projects

Is Art Criticism Possible in Art Projects?

The most important criticism of art projects in Japan is the idea that they leave no room for outside criticism because of the overriding emphasis they place on the process of the project. What can be the basis for criticism in art projects? From what point in the process should a critic begin his/her observation in order to establish an objective judgement? This is indeed a major issue that must be addressed.

For art projects which place emphasis on the process rather than the outcome, criticism from a traditional critical standpoint is logically impossible because of a mutually exclusive contradiction. Even if a critic attempts a critique of a work from an objective standpoint, they cannot gain access to its content unless they participate in its production process. However, doing so would eliminate the possibility of reaching an objective judgment. When considering this issue, it is worth noting that a work of art initially required criticism because of its autonomy and its absolute ascription to the artist as an individual. Because of this, it was necessary for critics to serve as a third party who could validate the work from the outside. Only after it was accompanied by critique could an artwork be socialized.

On the other hand, if the objective of co-creative

projects were to lie in the establishment of liminality, as Kitazawa claims, perhaps, this type of expression does not require art criticism. Judging from the extensive discussion of art projects regarding their social implications across various fields like sociology, cultural economics, and cultural policy, the basis for valid criticism is not limited to art alone. The social sciences can indeed evaluate art projects insofar as it is a critique of an art projects' ability to produce new channels for communication. But who is responsible for discussing the aesthetics of art projects? Clearly, this is something left unaddressed in fields within the social sciences. Discussion by art critics is limited to questioning the use of art for functional means and expressing concern for art being exploited by public administrations. The majority of art critics have not gone as far as to examine how the aesthetic aspect of art projects—their primitiveness or lack of refinement pointed out by Fukuzumi or the overloaded imagination of the participants in *Sun Self Hotel*—manifests as a form of beauty.

A Society of Independent-Minded Citizens

Unlike local rituals, art projects generate active discussion. They involve various non-specialist participants gathered for the event, discussing and

voicing candid opinions like “What part of this is art?” or “I don’t understand this, but it’s somehow interesting,” and in cases of long-term participation, “This artist isn’t at his/her best this time.” Indeed, the biggest difference between art projects and rituals is the fact that individual participants have no intention of blind submission and have a clear awareness of the events at hand. The difficulty of objective, constructive criticism from outside is admittedly problematic, but the diverse critical views that exist within the process of art projects provide some solace.

In order to impact society using approaches that differ from the usual ones, artists introduce their subjective viewpoints into people’s lives and ways of thinking. By proposing ideas that deviate slightly from the norm, artists undermine people’s understanding of what they consider to be common sense through a state of *communitas*. The artists avoid setting clear goals in order to ensure a certain level of purposelessness, yet attempt to generate some outcome in the daily life of the people who are participating. Art projects provide a place for people to sense a slight uncertainty or flexibility about what they thought was obvious or what they assumed or depended on.

This personal approach of art projects is perhaps only permissible in/as art. By exercising this prerogative, art projects depart from the vague idea of the public used by public administrations, in order to attempt to create another public, inclusive of actual individuals both present and absent. Their aim is to create an alternative public by establishing personal relationships, even if only temporarily, between individuals.

As a result of globalization, society at large paradoxically seems to seek straightforward and easily understandable answers more than ever. However, what we need is a society where people are not quick to reject things that are hard to understand or uncritically accept the opinions of specialists, but are able to contemplate the value of a seemingly purposeless act as an independent individual. The approach deployed by art projects holds potential for raising, albeit modestly, the awareness of individuals within civil society and serving as a catalyst for a

bottom-up development of social awareness. Sharing a temporary form of shared imagination which produces a new experience is what will impact people’s values, even if the experience is limited to the specific time and place of a project. If anything, the importance of art projects lies in the very fact that it does not aim to produce a universal set of values accepted by all. Art projects are by nature transient, fluid, and modest in scale. It is in its thorough particularity—in terms of time, place, and the people involved—that we see the potential and power of art projects.

Art Projects Japan's New Public Context for Contemporary Art

Contribution by Justin Jesty

The rise of socially engaged art, social practice, and new genre public art over the past two decades has been a global phenomenon. The social turn has had particularly deep impact in Japan, where the art world has seen a massive shift towards socially engaged art both in terms of artistic practice and art policy. As art and social reform have woven together to create new fields, art itself has begun to change and in Japan that change has been particularly pronounced. The art project (*āto purojekuto*), which is the subject of Sumiko Kumakura and The Art Project Research Group's work, is one expression of these shifts in practice, policy, and institutions.

As the first section of the report outlines, the art project substantially overlaps with socially engaged art but it is not the same kind of category. Socially engaged art refers first and foremost to something about the practice of art. An art project, however, is not necessarily an *art* project. In some cases it is: when the term is used to talk about coherent and self-contained projects initiated and run by artists, as in the work of Jun Kitazawa, Hiroshi Fuji, Otomo Yoshihide, and Kanayo Ueda, it is essentially interchangeable with socially engaged art. But in the majority of cases the term is not referring directly to artwork, but to a socially-engaged context for art. In the Beppu Project, the Echigo-Tsumari Triennale, the Asahi Arts Festival, or the Toride Art Project, for instance, many artists and non-artists participate in the project as a socially-engaged context, but not all of the artwork within it is socially engaged (though it's worth noting that even the most traditional-looking works of sculpture, installation, and photography often take on participatory, socially-minded add-ons when they are sited in an art project). Additionally, as is often pointed

out, Japan's art projects are always minimally recognized by local governments—they are legal—and in some cases local governments and community organizations are deeply involved in their planning and management. More provocative and confrontational socially engaged artists, like Chim ↑ Pom for example, are not included in the category.

The category of the art project has developed to come to terms with new contexts and interfaces for art. It has emerged at the center of recent transformations to Japan's art world, pulling together many of the strands of recent developments in socially engaged, participatory, and collaborative art, as well as patterns of institutional experiment and innovative context creation which are themselves socially engaged, participatory, and collaborative. It overlaps with socially engaged art insofar as both forge new contexts for creativity and exploration, but it also encompasses things as diverse as education and outreach programs at museums, public scholarship and community-engaged curriculum at universities, and the activities of various art-council-like entities at the local level that support art to strengthen and enrich local communities. Art projects are things that have appeared at the overlaps between fields that used to be more clearly divided: art and social welfare, art and vernacular culture, art and everyday life, art and education, etc. It is not necessarily a transitional form, but a form that has emerged at a transition, as art moves towards a postautonomous condition.¹ In this way, art projects are both a sign and vehicle of fundamental changes to the conditions of contemporary art's social existence in Japan.

As in other places, the changes in question are complex. They affect different people differently, and

¹ I am thinking particularly of Néstor García Canclini's account of this transition in *Art beyond itself: anthropology for a society without a story line*, translated by David Frye (Durham: Duke UP, 2014).

occasion both celebration and consternation. Perhaps the most common critique is that they encourage tepid art and provide no support for especially radical or refined work. This is a familiar critique of public art, addressed further below. Another concern—one also raised about socially engaged art—is that art projects have appeared just as infrastructural shifts have destabilized public and private support for art. Since the bursting of the bubble in Japan, both corporate and public support for the arts have shrunk. All formerly public museums are now semi-private. Amidst a neoliberal rhetoric emphasizing “autonomy” and “performance” many have struggled with budget cuts combined with increased programming demands. Much of the patronage that survives has shifted to grant-based programs that support an ecosystem of art NPOs. Funding is precarious and the system encourages producers to diversify their activities by taking on more roles, including social service roles. We might see art projects and socially engaged art more generally as a response to dwindling support for purer forms of art.

The concern is an important one, but it is far from clear whether any evidence supports it. It is worth noting that young artists are among the most passionate participants in these new contexts, and as Kumakura mentions in her text, the rise of art projects may well have increased opportunities for young artists in Japan. With almost no domestic market for contemporary art in Japan, what investment there is tends to follow the global market, not take risks on developing local talent. Museums have likewise had only a very limited role in supporting emerging artists. Modern and contemporary art—as living, developing fields—have always been in a precarious position. Going all the way back to the early 20th century, it has been DIY collectives of artists and enthusiasts who have supported the social existence of modern and contemporary art, taking on the role of critic, curator, and market to legitimize and establish value for artists’ work over their careers.² Neither museums, nor governments, nor the open market have played much of a role. When looking from the perspective of

contemporary artists in Japan, therefore, it is far from clear whether the system has become more restrictive or opened up more opportunity.

While there is not yet a clear answer to the question of how institutional shifts have affected the professional opportunities for artists, something that is already quite clear is that art projects have expanded opportunities for broader understanding of their work. They have brought artists and art into sustained contact with specific groups of people in many localities who had no previous knowledge of contemporary art. General audiences have also exploded. It is in this sense that we might think of art projects as examples of a new kind of public art, or perhaps, a new mode of public-ness for art in Japan, one that is much closer to the specificities of daily life in diverse localities, and more cognizant of addressing itself to a newly-enlarged domestic audience. Insofar as one values contemporary art for its autonomy, for its ability to rise above or cut through the infelicities of particularity and contingency, the new contexts for art will probably appear compromised. And insofar as one takes the privilege of the global market and critical establishment in determining artistic value to be legitimate, the hybridity and unevenness of the art in art projects may well be unsatisfactory.

But it is precisely at this point of controversy about what art should be and for whom, that art projects can be seen making a consistent intervention into cultural politics. While numerous social systems and economic infrastructures govern who can legitimately appear as an artist and what can appear as art, both art projects themselves and much of the art within them deliberately question such orderings, proceeding with an assumption of equality and inclusion, to rethink the value in marginalized practices and reaffirm the capacity of marginalized people to access and assess art. In the process they mix multiple registers of culture—traditional craft, contemporary art, children’s games, hobbies, postdramatic theater, music festival, talent show, and much more—into an experimental and sometimes chaotic hybrid: a new interface whose rules and proper place have not yet been worked out.

2 Tomii, Reiko. (2013). “Introduction: collectivism in twentieth-century Japanese art with a focus on operational aspects of Dantai,” *positions: asia critique*, 21(2), 225-267.



It is in the very unsettledness of the form, the way that it transgresses established categories and locations for culture, together with the distinct impression that it is artists who are leading the way while critics struggle in an environment that rejects established delineations of taste, that these new contexts for art may resemble an avant-garde. But if they are thought of as an avant-garde, it is an avant-garde in an unusual configuration.

If there is one element that seems essential to the 20th century avant-garde it is its association with development, modernization, and progress, albeit often in the mode of radical indictment of their dehumanizing effects under capitalism. The situation for art projects is quite different. Most take place in regional cities and rural areas: sites that are declining and depopulating, sometimes to the point of literal disappearance. These bring to light a situation that is rarely imagined in theories of capitalism and globalization. What happens when development is removed from the picture, as it is at most sites in Japan? At the core of many critiques of the society of the spectacle and neoliberalism is the insight that capitalism preys upon forms of everyday life with the effect of alienating it from its everyday context of production and consumption. But what happens in situations where capital is demonstrably withdrawing from everyday life? The result, I think, is unlikely to be unmitigated isolation and decay, nor outright liberation or a return to idealized community. More basically, the terms of cultural production in the everyday milieu appear to be shifting, as the organization of both the opportunities for and the costs of cultural production become less centralized, systematized, and professionalized.

Ten years ago, Japan's "lost decade" may still have seemed like an aberration: something unique to Japan and soon to be overcome anyway. But the global financial crisis has demonstrated that Japan is hardly alone in seeing development reverse, with little chance of it returning in the same form. Japan, like many countries now, remains developed, highly literate, globally-connected, but its public culture is dis-integrating and faith in the future has faltered. The most common experience and public understanding of this situation is negative, articulated as malaise,

deflation, disintegration. That negative valence, rooted in frustration and declining expectations, historically provides rich fuel for neo-nationalism. The future may well be dark.

But against these darker possibilities I would frame the experiments in new public art in Japan as beacons of hope. They have not given up on a vision of smaller-scale futures and publics, realized through dispersed creativity and efforts at cultural enfranchisement. In their integration into the circuits of contemporary art, they open themselves to critical currents and difference, while in their valuation of local and popular culture, they make contemporary art more diverse and accessible than it otherwise would be. In their concern for the handicapped, aging, and underprivileged, they address themselves to those most structurally invisible within the paradigm of unlimited development. In their duration, spanning years if not decades, they have the potential to sustain small-scale, constructed cultures in city, country, and everything in between. Finally, rather than investing in the narrative of malaise, they propose to discover value within spaces and activities economic logic has abandoned, implying that the solution is not development or other form of destructive grand resolution, but heightened awareness of how improvements and enrichments can be seeded in the here and now. If the best-remembered moment of the early twentieth century avant-gardes was their excoriating critique of capitalist development, perhaps Japan's experiments in new public art are the obverse: scattered, ad-hoc, often unassuming attempts to find value in the pockets of stillness left after the shadow of developmentalism has passed from the land.

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The idea for this booklet came from friends in the United States, Europe, and South East Asia, who themselves organize art projects that work closely with society, expressing their disappointment toward not being able to access the contents of *Nihongata āto purojekuto no rekishi to genzai 1990-2012* [Japan's art projects: their history and present state, 1990-2012], a research report myself and The Art Project Research Group (which I represent) published in Japanese. In response to their feedback, we arranged to have the report translated into English only to quickly realize that simply translating the material was not enough to fully convey its intent. The development of art projects in Japan is closely tied to specific social structures and values and many of the keywords used to discuss this topic are not necessarily translatable. And so, it became necessary for us to consider how to fully communicate the intentions of the report to English language readers.

The ones to take on this important task were the members of Art Translators Collective (Kanoko Tamura, Nobuko Aiso, Shuko Ebihara, and Tomoko Momiyama). Through countless meetings we deliberated—the collective members at times leading the discussion—on how the report could be received by an English language audience with a level of clarity. I would like to express my greatest respect, towards not only their highly skilled translation and editing but also their passion and their long-term commitment toward realizing the publication of this booklet.

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Photo by Hiroshi Ikeda

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The firing stages of ceramics, created by artist Kimura Toshirō Jinjin preparing the unglazed ceramics, and the workshop participants painting patterns on them. Kimura Toshirō Jinjin, *Nodate*, 2014. Oshishizuka-kofun Tumulus, Toyonaka City, Osaka. Photo by Ayaka Umeda.

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