



Contemporary Art, Activism and Social Crisis in Japan Echigo-Tsumari, Setouchi and Beyond

Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Cultures (SISJAC)
The Hostry, Norwich Cathedral
3-4 December 2015

Although almost entirely unobserved in the many publications in international art theory and art history devoted in recent years to the avant guard aesthetics of a movement variously labelled “socially engaged art”, “relational aesthetics”, “community art” or “new genre public art”, Japan since the 1990s has seen a flowering of hugely ambitious art festivals and triennale that bring contemporary art to bear on the many social crises the country faces. These include ageing and rural/urban divides, post-industrial decline and depopulation, political disengagement, and—most recently—natural disasters. Foremost among such events have been the visionary rural countryside and island based festivals organised by the curator Kitagawa Fram, notably Echigo-Tsumari in mountainous Niigata (2000-2015), and the Setouchi islands around Naoshima (2010-2016), for which he acts as General Director, with the influential philanthropist Fukutake Soichiro as General Producer. These festivals bring huge numbers of young volunteers and ticket paying urban visitors to travel around remote locations where they encounter the best of Japanese and international contemporary art in unusual and sometimes extreme locations, as well as engaging with highly isolated and ageing populations often living in *genkai shuuraku*, i.e. settlements destined to die out soon with depopulation. It is at once a romantic and ecological vision, seeking to put the Japanese public in touch again with its regional roots and a sense of nature lost as a result of urbanisation, as well as utilising contemporary art as a tool of tourism and regional revitalisation, under the most difficult political, demographic and financial conditions.

This programme introduces a two day conference to discuss the philosophy, enactment and critical problems of this extraordinary Japanese social movement in engaged art, particularly in view of its potential as an international model and inspiration. The event brings together local and international art theorists and historians, Japanese studies specialists, social scientists and practicing curators. It is also be the first UK invitation of Kitagawa Fram, on the occasion of the publishing of the American translation of his Echigo-Tsumari handbook, *Art Place Japan* with Princeton Architectural Press in Autumn 2015.

Thursday 3rd December

1800 Arrivals

1830 Welcome by Mami MIZUTORI (Executive Director, SISJAC)
Introduction by Adrian FAVELL (SISJAC/University of Leeds)

Conference Keynote speech

* Fram KITAGAWA (Chairman Art Front Gallery & General Director of Echigo Tsumari & Setouchi Festivals), with trans. by Rei MAEDA (Art Front Gallery)

“ART IN THE AGE OF THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT”

A presentation of the life's work, philosophy and applied curation of the visionary Tokyo-based art producer **Fram Kitagawa**, focusing on the artists and works featured at the Echigo-Tsumari triennial in the northern Japanese province of Niigata. He will be joined in this highly visual presentation by translator and editor, **Rei Maeda**, who works with Kitagawa as a coordinator at his Art Front Gallery organisation. A bi-lingual discussion and Q & A will follow with the Director of IKON Gallery Birmingham, **Jonathan Watkins**, who has pioneered an alternate socially and politically engaged vision of Japanese contemporary art in many international shows, including the groundbreaking Hayward Gallery show, *Facts of Life* (2001), and work with the artist/producer Tadashi Kawamata, one of the key artists involved in Kitagawa's festivals.

Discussion

* Jonathan WATKINS (Director, IKON Gallery Birmingham)

Q & A led by: Adrian FAVELL

Chair: Simon KANER (Director, Japanese Studies Centre, UEA)

2000-2030 Reception

Friday 4th December

Friday offers a day long reflection on the particularities and international resonance of contemporary art in Japan that has engaged in activism and intervention into the various social, political and environmental crises faced by the society—particularly in the light of de-population and rural/urban divides, political disengagement and, most recently, terrible natural disasters. Our agenda reflects the following questions.

- How much does “post-growth” Japan provide a global model for understanding the trajectory and crises of other advanced industrial societies?
- Can art play a role in social care and welfare provision in ageing societies, or is this a symptom of governmental neglect of remote and peripheral locations?
- How has Japan changed since the massive disasters of March 2011, and what is to be learned from new kinds of community building taking place around the country?
- What are the parallels to be drawn between the context of rural Japan and the challenges of making the arts meaningful in an agricultural region such as East Anglia?

We will discuss these and other questions as part of discussions which question the image and understanding of contemporary Japan as a world leader.

0900 Arrivals

0930 Sociology, Politics and Art of De-Population and Social Crisis in Japan

* Peter MATANLE (Senior Lecturer, Japanese Studies, University of Sheffield)
“SOCIOLOGY, POLITICS AND ART OF DE-POPULATION AND SOCIAL CRISIS”

As a backdrop to our discussion on the social relevance of arts and culture in contemporary Japan, we start with an overview of Japanese population and (de)urbanisation trends and the political and social challenge of finding solutions in a post-industrial society facing devastating effects of ageing, abandoned housing, and widening gaps between slow rural life and ongoing hi-tech urban concentration. **Peter Matanle** is a leading figure in the discussion of how Japan’s experience in recent decades may offer clues for a more enlightened discussion on demographic, environmental and economic crisis in advanced industrial societies worldwide. He will be joined on stage by the philosopher **Rupert Read**, a prominent member of the UK Green Party and an advocate of “post-growth” politics and economics.

Chair: Adrian FAVELL

Discussion: Rupert READ (Reader in Philosophy, UEA and UK Green Party)

1030-1100 Coffee/Tea

1100 **Special Invited Curator's Lecture (1)**

* Mizuki ENDO (Curator, Director Higashiyama Artist Placement Service Kyoto)
Chair and Discussion: Jenny WHITE (British Council)

"ARCHIVE FEVER AS NUCLEAR REACTION: NEW INSTITUTIONALISM IN JAPANESE CONTEMPORARY ART AFTER 3/11"

A leading independent curator and art writer in Japan, who combines curatorial work at home and abroad with the practice of rice farming north of Kyoto, **Mizuki Endo**, will introduce three recent exhibitions that have dealt with nuclear power and its (disastrous) effects in Japan: *Looking Atomic Bomb 1945-1970* which would have been held in April 2011, but was cancelled in the atmosphere of self-imposed control just after 3.11; *Artists and the Disaster—Documentation in Progress*, Art Tower Mito, 2012, the first "raw" response of artists to the disasters of March the year before; and *Don't Follow the Wind*, Watarium Museum, 2015, controversial art group Chim ↑ Pom's curatorial collaboration which situates unviewable works within the nuclear exclusion zone of Fukushima. Each of the shows concerns archives and archival practice, although their approaches are different in each case. The linkage of nuclear power and archive is a defining characteristic of contemporary art in Japan (as was pointed out by Takashi Murakami in his curatorial work, *Little Boy*). The presentation discusses how these archival practices in specific contexts correspond with new institutionalism in Japan. Endo will be joined in discussion with **Jenny White** of the British Council whose long international career in the arts has focused particularly on Japan and questions of environmentalism.

1400 **New Research Panel**

To open the afternoon session, we are pleased to introduce new research by **Eiko Honda** and **Hiroki Yamamoto**, which bring critical dimensions of political ecology and post-colonialism to the discussion of socially and politically engaged art in Japan. For commentary, we turn to the distinguished art historian **Gen Adachi**, whose work spans historical and contemporary periods of modern Japan, and curator and art theorist **Ele Carpenter**, whose wide interests in politicised art and social networks have focused recently in particular on the question of nuclear disaster in Japan.

* Eiko HONDA (Bunka-cho Curatorial Fellow, London)

"POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF ART AND ARCHITECTURE IN JAPAN: 100 YEARS AGO AND NOW"

What does it mean to discuss 'political ecology' in art and architecture now in the East Asian context? The paper investigates this question through the historiography of Japan, re-examined through the lens of present-day practices of art and architecture. It considers how alternate notions of ecology, art and architecture there, particularly associated with the turn of the century naturalist Kumagusu Minakata, became neglected 100 years ago in the shadow of Japanese

society's hurried Western modernisation during the Meiji era, and how their resurgence today may cast a new light on our contemporary crisis.

* Hiroki YAMAMOTO (Researcher, TrAIN, Chelsea College of Art and Design)
“THE ART OF DE-COLONISATION: SOCIALLY ENGAGED ART AND POST-COLONIAL ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY JAPAN”

There are three purposes in this presentation. Firstly, to examine the historical and structural particularities of postcolonial issues in Japan, to be more precise, in East Asia. Secondly, to examine how contemporary Japanese artists have tackled the post-war problems in Japan. The discussion is limited to the subject of social practice in contemporary art in works after 2000. As will be explained, the reason for this is due to the current regional situation in East Asia. Thirdly, based on the two above examinations, to consider both the possibility and the future challenge of socially engaged art working on postcolonial issues in Japan.

Chair & Commentary: Gen ADACHI (Art Historian, Bunka-cho Visiting Scholar, TrAIN, Chelsea)

Discussion: Ele CARPENTER (Curator and Lecturer, Goldsmiths College)

1530 Coffee / Tea

1600 **Special Invited Curator's Lecture (2)**

* Mizuki TAKAHASHI (Curator, Mito Art Tower)

Chair and Discussion: Keith WHITTLE (Curator & Research Fellow, Central St. Martins London)

“WHAT IS EXPECTED IN COMMUNITY ENGAGED ART?”

Widely noted for her politically engaged and deeply researched approach to art shows in Japan, curator **Mizuki Takahashi** will present the example of *Cafe in Mito*, an early example of a community engaged art project held at her home museum in Mito, a small city to the North East of Tokyo. *Cafe in Mito* is abbreviation of “Communicative Action for Everybody in Mito” and was initially conceived by Eriko Osaka, an ex-artistic director of Art Tower Mito and currently director of Yokohama Museum of Art. *Cafe in Mito* was first held in 2002 and was very well received by the community, and has come to be held irregularly once every two-four years since. She will focus on the gap of anticipation between the organisers and the audience as a key problem of community art. In discussion, will be the curator **Keith Whittle**, whose research for a number of years has been mapping out the field of socially engaged and community arts projects in Japan, as part of a broad practice that has introduced many new artists from Japan to audiences in the UK.

1700 **Closing Panel Discussion: Socially Engaged Art in Japan as an International Model?**

Responses to the conference:

- * Kaori HOMMA (Artist and Director, Art Action UK)
- * Veronica SEKULES (Curator and Head of Education and Research, Sainsbury Centre for the Visual Arts, UEA, Norwich)
- * Neil POWELL (Pro-Vice Chancellor, Norwich University of the Arts)

To close the conference, and continuing on from the previous session, we will seek to open out the discussion to both the local Norwich arts and rural context, and to the state of activist art in the UK more generally. Artist **Kaori Homma** has been central in founding Art Action UK, a London-based collective of artists, curators, gallerists and writers who are exploring various means to show solidarity and support for people who have been affected by natural and manmade disasters. In partnership with the sociologist and cultural critic Yoshitaka Mouri they launched an annual residency programme which has brought emerging artists from Japan to London such as duo Komori and Seo and Yoi Kawakubo, whose work directly deals with the aftermath of 3.11. **Veronica Sekules**, deputy director of the Sainsbury Centre, is a well known specialist on art and education whose recent work has reflected precisely on the relevance of contemporary art to the rural environment in the region. She will be well placed to offer some thoughts on the parallels and potentials of the kinds of ideas being developed with contemporary art in rural Japan. She is also about to open a new gallery space in a renovated historical building in the rural town of King's Lynn that will further create a base for exploring these interests. Joining the discussion will be Pro-Vice Chancellor of the Norwich University of the Arts, **Neil Powell**, a sculptor whose research and practice has long focused on critical theory, conceptual and environmental art. He has a particular interest in art institutional connections and parallels between the UK and Japan, as part of an engagement by local art institutions in building links with partners in Japan, notably including growing connections with Niigata prefecture.

Closing Discussion joined by:

Panelists: Jonathan WATKINS, Mizuki ENDO, Mizuki TAKAHASHI

Chaired with Q & A led by Adrian FAVELL



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With our grateful thanks to all the help and support received from staff and colleagues at SISJAC. Thanks also to colleagues at the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, the University of East Anglia, the Norwich University of the Arts, and members of the local Norwich arts community for their enthusiasm in welcoming the event and helping in its promotion.

Keynote speakers



Fram Kitagawa is Chairman of Art Front Gallery, Tokyo, and General Director of the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale and Setouchi Triennale. The two triennials are among the largest contemporary art events in the world—attracting around half a million visitors to Echigo-Tsumari and around a million to Setouchi, to see and participate in a range of artworks and events in rural contexts. A translation of his writing, *Art Place Japan: The Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale and the Vision to Reconnect Art and Nature* is published by Princeton Architectural Press in November 2015 and will be available at the event.



Jonathan Watkins is Director of Ikon Gallery, Birmingham since 1999. He was previously Curator of the Serpentine Gallery (1995-1997) and Director of Chisenhale Gallery (1990-1995). His major exhibitions include the Biennale of Sydney (1998), *Facts of Life: Contemporary Japanese Art* (Hayward Gallery, London 2001), Shanghai Biennale (2006), and the Guangzhou Triennial (2012). He has written extensively on contemporary art including, among Japanese artists, essays on Tadashi Kawamata and a Phaidon monograph on On Kawara.

<http://www.ikon-gallery.org>



Mizuki Endo works as an independent curator, art consultant and writer. He is the executive director of Higashiyama Artists Placement Service (HAPS), an artists support program run by the city of Kyoto. Endo established three artist-run spaces in Asia: Art Space Tetra (Fukuoka, 2004), Future Prospects Art Space (Manila, 2005), and Playroom (Mito, 2007). and was awarded the 3rd Lorenzo Bonaldi Art Prize for international young curators in 2005. He was the director of Arcus Project (Moriya, Japan 2007-2010), the guest curator of Yutaka Sone: *Perfect Moment* (Tokyo Opera City Art Gallery, 2011), and the residence program director of Kunisaki Art Project 2012 (Oita Prefecture, Japan). His recent publications include *America MADE*, featuring interviews with Yuko Hasegawa, Takashi Murakami and Koki Tanaka and *The end of the road, care for the self*, a diary/essay about the Tohoku earthquake.

Programme



Mizuki Takahashi is a senior curator at Contemporary Art Center, Art Tower Mito and she is currently based in London as a research fellow in Central Saint Martins. Takahashi has realized cross-disciplinary exhibitions addressing various contemporary cultures from manga, architecture, performance, film, music and visual art. Her curated exhibitions in and outside Japan include *Eight Days: Beuys in Japan* (Art Tower Mito, 2009, partly toured to Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin, 2011), *Quiet Attentions: Departure from Women* (Art Tower Mito, 2011), and *Tadasu Takamine's Cool Japan* (Art Tower Mito, 2012).

Conference participants



Gen Adachi is an art historian and critic specializing in the history of art and cartoons of Modern Japan. Adachi completed his Ph.D. at Tokyo University of the Arts in 2008. From 2010 to 2013, he was a Post-doctoral fellow of Japan Society for Promotion of Science. Currently he is a visiting fellow at the Research Centre for Transnational Art, Identity and Nation (TrAIN), University of the Arts, London, supported by a grant from the Japanese Government Overseas Study Program for Artists. His book *Zen'ei no Idenshi (Memos of the Japanese Avant-garde in Japan: From Anarchism to Postwar Art)*, was published by Brücke in 2012.



Ele Carpenter is a curator and writer on interdisciplinary politicised art and social networks of making. Her current research into 'Nuclear Culture' was awarded an AHRC Early Career Fellowship in partnership with The Arts Catalyst and the Submarine Dismantling Advisory Group (SDP-AG). The project brings together nuclear stakeholders and artists to create new artworks in response to issues raised by nuclear culture in the 21st Century. Previously, Ele curated *Open Source Embroidery* investigating relationships between open source software and collective craft, including an international touring exhibition (Bildmuseet, Sweden; Museum of Craft & Folk Art, San Francisco) and collectively produced and distributed artworks *Html Patchwork* and *Embroidered Digital Commons*.



Adrian Favell is Chair in Sociology and Social Theory at the University of Leeds, UK. A 2006-7 Japan Foundation Abe Fellow, he is the author of *Before and After Superflat: A Short History of*

Programme

Japanese Contemporary Art 1990-2011 (2012), and has also published essays in *Art in America*, *Bijutsu Techo*, *Impressions*, *Artforum*, and (as a blogger) *ART-iT* online. He is currently working on a book about "post-growth" art and architecture in Japan. More info: www.adrianfavell.com



Kaori Homma is an artist, and Associate Lecturer at University of Arts London. Homma is also a co-founder and the Coordinator of Art Action UK, which was set up in response to 2011 Tsunami/ Earth Quake/ Fukushima Nuclear Fallout Disaster. Homma's practice traverses art, politics, theology and activism. Graduated from Tokyo University of Art and Design, MA in Sculpture at Chelsea School of Art, Homma is based in London, exhibiting internationally. website: www.kaorihomma.co.uk



Eiko Honda is a curator and Fellow of the Overseas Study Programme for Artists, Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs. Her work concerns the production and narrative of visual cultures, and interdisciplinary practices which rethink current mainstream cultural assumptions grounded in the everyday, with a goal to imagine more integrated thinking about art, humanities and science in the future. Recent projects include: *Saya Kubota: Missing Post Office UK* (2015-2016) Ikon Gallery, Birmingham and Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation, London; *Noodles Against the Machine: the Politics of Food and Artists' Resistance in Contemporary Japan* (2014), The Guesthouse, Cork, Ireland; and *Unlocking the Diary: The Archiving of Nameless Memories* (2014) Folkstone Fringe for Folkestone Triennale, UK. More info: <http://curatingcuriosities.tumblr.com/>



Simon Kaner is Director of the Centre for Japanese Studies at the University of East Anglia and Head of the Centre for Archaeology and Heritage at the Sainsbury Institute. He is an archaeologist specialising in the prehistory of Japan. A Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London since 2005, he undertakes archaeological research in Japan, the UK and worldwide, and worked for several years in archaeological heritage management in the UK. His recent publications include *The Power of Dogu: ceramic figures from ancient Japan* (2009), which accompanied a major exhibition at the British Museum.



Peter Matanle is Senior Lecturer in Japanese Studies and Director of Research and Innovation at the School of East Asian Studies, University of Sheffield. His research interests are in the social and cultural geography of East Asian development. Peter has published widely on depopulation and its social and environmental impacts in Japan, including articles in *Social Science Japan*

Programme

Journal, Local Environment, and Japanstudien, and led the the Shrinking Regions Research Group in producing *Japan's Shrinking Regions in the 21st Century: Contemporary Responses to Depopulation and Socioeconomic Decline* (Cambria Press, 2011). He is currently developing a new comparative study on 'Achieving the Depopulation Dividend' in Japan, New Zealand and the EU.



Mami Mizutori is Executive Director of the Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Cultures since 2011, and Special Advisor for Japanese Studies at the University of East Anglia. Previously she worked for the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where her last position was Budget Director for the Foreign Ministry. She has worked in diplomacy worldwide, and also writes on a variety of topics in politics and economics for contemporary Japanese media, as well as offering analyses on diplomacy for think tanks and national governments. She is a Managing Trustee of the Daiwa Anglo-Japan Foundation, and a Trustee of the Japan Society of the UK and the Association for Aid and Relief Japan, and serves as a non-executive Director of Fidelity Japanese Values PLC.



Neil Powell is Pro-Vice Chancellor at the Norwich University of the Arts. A sculptor, he works with a varied range of materials and idioms, from objects through to printed matter. He also works with artists as diverse as Lawrence Weiner, Alfredo Jaar, and the late Ian Hamilton Finlay, whose works formed part of the successful exhibition *A Spectre at The Feast*, which he curated in downtown Manhattan, New York City. Professor Powell's sculptural and written works attempt to problematise the linguistic turn in art from the mid 20th Century onward. Of special interest are areas such as Concrete Poetry, Sculpture in all its guises, and forms of Conceptual and environmental art.



Rupert Read is Reader in Philosophy in the School of Politics, Philosophy, Language and Communication Studies at the University of East Anglia. A specialist on Wittgenstein and the philosophy of science, he is also a prominent member of the UK Green Party, spokesperson on transport, and comments widely on sustainable transport, green economics and social justice. He is developing an ecological critique of political liberalism reflected in recent publications on "post-growth" thinking.

Programme



Veronica Sekules is head of education and research at the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, University of East Anglia, Norwich, where she was formerly a curator. She is responsible for developing learning and research programmes, artists' projects and residencies, and outreach and training. She was trained as an art historian, specialising in the Middle Ages and 20th century art and is widely published in these areas. She has recently been doing research on contemporary art in rural environments, looking at the changing relations of artist and audience, and conceptions of the local.



Jenny White is Environment Project Manager for the British Council responsible for environmental management across the organisation. Previously she worked in Cuba, Thailand, Japan, and London as Head of Arts Development, developing art projects with independent artists, creative partners and cultural organisations. In Japan, she produced the arts and creative economy programme for two major festivals, UK90 and UK98. She is interested in how art can (re)vitalise a space and include local communities, and has an on-going interest in Japanese, Korean, South East Asian, and Latin American contemporary art and inclusive design.



Keith Whittle is a specialist in the field of Modern and Contemporary Japanese Art, and Japanese studies on which he gives public lectures, presentations and talks. A recipient of Japan Foundation fellowship in Tokyo 2011-12, undertaking research exploring Art Projects in Japan and socially engaged art and social practice; objectives, practices and considerations, from curatorial and artistic strategies to political, social and economic agendas. He is currently a Research Fellow at Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London, Lecturer at Sotheby's Institute of Art and curator at White Rainbow Gallery, London and Beppu Project NPO, Oita Japan.



Hiroki Yamamoto is an artist and practice-based PhD candidate at the Research Centre for Transnational Art, Identity and Nation (TrAIN), University of the Arts London. He is a recipient of many grants including the Pola Foundation Grants for Overseas Study by Young Artists (2015) and the British Council Japan Association Fellowship (2015). His recent exhibitions include *Representation of Others or Others of Representation* (2015, Kyoto Art Center, Kyoto), *Quid Pro Quo: Negotiating Futures* (2014, Changing Spaces, Cambridge), and *Third Ghetto Biennale* (2013, Haiti).