

Artists and the Disaster: Imagining in the 10th Year



Haruka Komori + Natsumi Seo, *Double layered town/Making a song to replace our positions*, 2019
©Komori Haruka + Seo Natsumi

Exhibition Overview

- Title:** Artists and the Disaster: Imagining in the 10th Year
- Dates:** Saturday, February 20, 2021 - Sunday, May 9, 2021
Closed on Mondays, except May 3
- Open Hours:** 10:00 - 18:00 (no admittance after 17:30)
- Venue:** Contemporary Art Gallery, Art Tower Mito
- Artists:** Don't Follow the Wind, Hikaru Fujii, Akira Kamo,
Haruka Komori + Natsumi Seo, Nishiko, Makiko Satake, Tadasu Takamine
- Admission:** ¥900 (¥700 group of more than 20 people)
Free of charge for high school student, seniors over 70, the disabled and one accompanying attendant
→ Student card or other identification with age required.
- **First Friday** : special discount for students and senior citizens.
→ Student card holders and seniors 65 to 69 get a discount rate of ¥100 each first Friday (March 5, April 2, May 7).
- **Admission free on March 11th.**
- Organized by:** Mito Arts Foundation
- Grants:** The Kao Foundation for Arts and Sciences, Nomura Foundation,
Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Mondriaan Fund, Stroom Den Haag
- Support:** Suntory Holdings Limited
- Curator:** Yuu Takehisa (Senior Curator, Contemporary Art Center, Art Tower Mito)

Exhibition Concept

March 2021 will see the Great East Japan Earthquake's tenth anniversary.

Art Tower Mito, which itself suffered damage from the earthquake and functioned as a makeshift evacuation center right after the disaster in 2011, organized the exhibition "Artists and the Disaster: Documentation in Progress" in 2012. This exhibition chronologically introduced the diverse activities of artists following the calamity, irrespective of whether activities were meant as "art." Back then, soon after the massive catastrophe and amid questioning about art's role, a majority of artists' activities focused on support and documentation.

Ten years on, artists are now responding to the disaster through "artworks." With a refreshed focus on "arousing imagination" — the nature of art — this exhibition introduces artworks that reconnect us to the catastrophe. As the Great East Japan Earthquake is becoming something of the "past," these artworks aim to pass down stories for the generation of people who were still very young when it occurred, for those of us marking the tenth anniversary, and for future generations who are yet to be born. It is because one of the problems the disaster has laid bare is our "lack of imagination." Yet, is imagining/making imagine not one of art's primary roles?

Key Elements of the Exhibition

- Experiencing the passing of ten years and facing changed and unchanged elements

Through a video that documented the performance of the conversations people actually had in anxiety about the risk of the nuclear power plant accident, viewers are invited to think back to ten years ago. Other artists who conducted continuous fieldwork in the affected areas show their reflection on the past ten years through artworks that depict the scenes and words they encountered on site in forms of paintings, texts, and videos. These works respectively shed light on what changed and what apparently remained unchanged.

- The line that cannot be drawn — the involved and the uninvolved

Concerning the Great East Japan Earthquake, it is impossible to clearly delineate the involved and the uninvolved. The artists introduced in the exhibition have voluntarily become "involved" and faced the disaster: in one case, an artist delivered small stories about the disaster to distant places; in another case, an artist set up a place for discussions involving other people. In facing the diverse realities of the calamity, brought forth by each artist's unique method, what is in question is our own involvedness.

- Fostering imagination and dialog—the artist as a messenger

Nishiko conducted the *Repairing Earthquake Project*, in which she collected everyday objects broken by the Great East Japan Earthquake's tsunami at the Miyagi Prefecture coastal area. She then repaired the objects herself, fostering imagination and dialog with those objects as media. Since 2011, the project has expanded to the Netherlands and to Canada and reached the phase in 2013 in which the repaired objects are hosted in ordinary households in the Netherlands. In the project's seventh phase, as produced for this exhibition, objects' "foster parents" in the Netherlands talk about their diverse feelings toward those objects. Small but important episodes the artist communicates with those objects as vehicle aroused people's imagination in a distant place. Now, they are delivered back to viewers in Japan.

- A new work that considers discrimination together with contemporary elementary school students

In exploring how to express and pass down knowledge of the animosities caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake, Hikaru Fujii faces the "psychological problems" (bullying and discrimination) that the Fukushima people have been experiencing. On the other hand, this exhibition's preparation period during 2020 occurred when the spread of the novel coronavirus made everyone anxious. With radioactive substances and viruses, Fujii sees baseless discrimination caused by a fear of the unknown and of the invisible, as with the racial discrimination that triggered the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020.

In the 1960s, Jane Elliott, a teacher in the US who lamented racial discrimination by white people, conducted a legendary class with her students in response to the murder of Martin Luther King Jr. Fujii wrote a script of an "post 3/11 version" of this class with the help of local educators, and directed the re-enactment of the class with Japanese elementary students, making it into his latest work that will be presented in this exhibition.

*Jane Elliott's elementary school class in the US was recorded in the documentary film *A Class Divided*, which received an Emmy in 1985.

Associated programs for this exhibition will be conducted in Japanese.

Please consult our website for information in Japanese.

Press Image Stock

The images are available for press purpose. Please contact Torii at the office.

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1. Akira Kamo, *Standing Near Kitaide, Namiemachi, Futaba District, Fukushima Prefecture*, 2019 Photo: Ken Kato

2. Haruka Komori + Natsumi Seo, *Double layered town/Making a song to replace our positions*, 2019 ©Komori Haruka + Seo Natsumi

3. Makiko Satake, *Hiyoriyama-Hello Again*, 2020

4. Tadasu Takamine, *Japan Syndrome - Mito Version*, 2012

5. Nishiko, *Repairing Earthquake Project, the seventh phase (Message), Object #2012_3 (serving plate)*, 2020 Photo: Nicola Kirkaldy

6. Hikaru Fujii, title tbd, 2020-21

7. Grand Guignol Mirai, *Grand Guignol Mirai 2020*, 2020, Courtesy of Don't Follow the Wind

Artists' Biography

Akira Kamo (born in Tokyo in 1982, lives in Saitama Prefecture)

Akira Kamo is a painter who graduated from the Painting Department, Faculty of Fine Arts, Tokyo University of the Arts. Since the Great East Japan Earthquake, Kamo has seen “painting” and “surviving” as synonymous and has produced paintings of social and individual phenomena, as well as imagery, from people, events, and history he encounters in various places. In recent years, he has set one of his themes as the large-scale disasters Japan has faced, such as in the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, Minamata disease, and the nuclear power plant accident in Fukushima. His major solo exhibitions include “Tomioka Town and a Portrait of Its Scenery” (Tomioka Town Art & Media Center, 2020), “Wind Blowing Through Boundary” (LOKO GALLERY, 2019), “Vicarious Scene” (Maruki Gallery for the Hiroshima Panels, 2018), and “Portrait of the Scene” (Tsunagi Art Museum, 2017).

Haruka Komori + Natsumi Seo

Haruka Komori + Natsumi Seo is an art unit of video artist Haruka Komori, who was born in Shizuoka Prefecture in 1989 and obtained a master's degree in Intermedia Art from the Graduate School of Fine Arts, Tokyo University of the Arts, and painter and writer Natsumi Seo, who was born in Tokyo in 1988 and obtained a master's degree in painting from the Graduate School of Fine Arts, Tokyo University of the Arts. Their collaborative activities were triggered by their visit to Tohoku for volunteer activities in response to the Great East Japan Earthquake, after which they lived and produced artworks in Rikuzentakata, Iwate Prefecture, for three years beginning in 2012. After moving to Sendai in 2015, they established General Incorporated Association NOOK, an organization for producing recordings in collaboration with the community. They continue their creative activities with the theme of recording the scenery and people's words, as well as organizing exhibitions and workshops as a place of dialog.

Makiko Satake (born in Miyagi Prefecture in 1991, lives in Miyagi Prefecture)

Makiko Satake is an artist who obtained a master's degree in painting from the Fine Arts Course of the Graduate School of Art and Design, Musashino Art University. In response to the Great East Japan Earthquake, Satake produced the “Fake Bus Stop” series (2015–2018), in which she placed objects that resemble municipal bus stops in the tsunami-stricken coastal areas of Sendai. In 2017, after her exchange with people in the coastal areas, she returned to painting. Satake participated in “VOCA Exhibition 2017 Vision of Contemporary Art—New Artists in Painting” (The Ueno Royal Museum), and her major solo exhibitions include “Tracing Residue of the Waves” (Tohoku Research and Art Center [TRAC], 2020). Satake is a board member of General Incorporated Association NOOK.

Tadasu Takamine (born in Kagoshima Prefecture in 1968, lives in Tokyo)

Tadasu Takamine is an artist and theater director. He graduated from the Urushi Lacquering Course, Department of Crafts, Kyoto City University of Arts and Institute of Advanced Media Arts and Sciences (IAMAS). In the 1990s, Takamine was active as a performer in Dumb Type. As in his “Japan Syndrome” series

(2011–2012), in which people's conversations in response to the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant Accident were reenacted, Takamine presents issues in the contemporary society by drawing on his personal experiences and bodily sensations, presenting them via diverse media such as performances, videos, and installations. He participated in the 50th La Biennale di Venezia (2003), and his major solo exhibitions include "Too Far to See" (Yokohama Museum of Art and two other venues, 2011) and "Tadasu Takamine's COOL JAPAN" (Contemporary Art Gallery, Art Tower Mito, 2012–2013).

Nishiko (born in Kagoshima Prefecture in 1981, lives in The Hague, Netherlands)

Nishiko is an artist who graduated from the Photography Course, Visual Communication Major, Department of Design, Tokyo Zokei University, as well as the Department of Fine Arts at the Royal Academy of Art, The Hague. She has been archiving her own experiences of encountering negative events, mundane norms, and events that diverge slightly from normality. Nishiko attempts to reveal the values of mundane life by emphasizing the opposite of how specific subjects are normally seen or treated and showing their intriguing features. She uses media ranging from objects, installations, publications, actions, and sounds to websites. Her major solo show is "Repairing Earthquake Project" (Stroom Den Haag, 2018). She was a longlist nominee for the 2017 Prix de Rome.

Hikaru Fujii (born in Tokyo in 1976, lives in Tokyo)

Hikaru Fujii is an artist and film director. He graduated with a DEA in Aesthetics, Sciences and Technology of the Arts from University of Paris 8. Fujii creates work, mainly in the form of video installations, that responds to contemporary social issues through detailed research and fieldwork on the unique cultures and histories of various countries and regions. He organizes workshops that serve as intersections for interdisciplinary and artistic collaborations between specialists from diverse fields. He also reenacts historical events with participants and generates situations from which active discussion arises. By linking the present with the past, he structurally critiques the domains of history and society that remain invisible. He is the winner of the 2017 Nissan Art Award grand prize and the 2020–2022 Tokyo Contemporary Art Award.

Don't Follow the Wind

Don't Follow the Wind is a project that has been underway since 2015 in the Fukushima exclusion zone caused by the disaster at TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station. New works by 12 artists have been developed and are exhibited in multiple venues in the zone lent by former residents. As the area is still closed to the public it is a project that cannot be seen until the blockade in the area is lifted. This project was initiated by Chim ↑ Pom. Project curators are Kenji Kubota, Eva and Franco Mattes, and Jason Waite. Participating artists are Ai Weiwei, Aiko Miyanaga, Chim ↑ Pom, Grand Guignol Mirai, Nikolaus Hirsch and Jorge Otero-Pailos, Kota Takeuchi, Eva and Franco Mattes, Meiro Koizumi, Nobuaki Takekawa, Ahmet Ögüt, Trevor Paglen, and Taryn Simon.

NOTES

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Regarding the exhibition, contact Yuu Takehisa (Senior Curator, Contemporary Art Center, Art Tower Mito)

Regarding educational programs, contact Junko Moriyama, Maiko Sato (Educational program coordinators)

For public relations and publicity of photographs, contact Kaori Torii (PR).

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Requests regarding publication of information:

1. Please make sure to use the official title of the exhibition, along with the exhibition dates.
2. When using photographs, please put captions, credits and any other information attached to a photograph adjacent to the photo.
3. The phone number of Art Tower Mito to be published is +81 (0)29 227 8111 only.
4. Please send Kaori Torii a copy of the VTR, newspaper or magazine for our archives.
5. For interviews with an artist or to photograph the exhibition, please contact Kaori Torii in advance. Requests may not be accepted under some circumstances.

ACCESS

Train:

Take the Limited Express on the JR Joban Line from Tokyo Station (also from Shinagawa and Ueno Station) in Tokyo, and get off at Mito Station. The Express runs every 30 min. The ride takes 65-85 min.(¥3,890)

From Mito Station, take a bus for Daiku-machi from the stop no. 4, 5, 6 or 7 at the north exit bus terminal and get off at Izumi-cho 1-chome outside Keisei Department Store, the forth stop. (¥170) It is a 2 min. walk to Art Tower Mito.

*Mito Station (the north exit) --> Ichu-zaka --> Minami-machi Ni-chome --> Minami-machi San-chome --> Izumi-cho 1-chome

Highway Bus (Mito-go):

Take a highway bus bound for Mito (via Akatsuka route or Ibarakidaigaku route) from the highway bus terminal located at the Yaesu south gate of Tokyo JR station. (¥2,120)

The ride takes approx. 100 min. Get off at the Izumi-cho 1-chome stop, opposite Keisei Department Store. It is a 2 min. walk to Art Tower Mito.

Car:

Get off at Mito IC on Joban Highway, and drive toward the city center on the route 50 for about 20 min.

Pay parking is available on the basement level of Art Tower Mito. Gate is at the north side of the main building.

Free for 30 min., ¥200 for an hour and ¥100 for every additional 30 min. Open from 7:00 to 23:00.