



Overview

Exhibition Title: Sato Masaharu Trace – absence of presence/presence of absence

Date: Saturday, November 13, 2021-Sunday, January 30, 2022

Closed on Mondays (except January 10, public holiday) and January 11 and New Year Holidays
December 27-January 3

Open Hours: 10:00-18:00 (no admittance after 17:30)

Venue: Contemporary Art Gallery, Art Tower Mito

Artist: Masaharu Sato

Admission: ¥900 (¥700 for 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.

- One-year Pass: ¥2,000 for a one-year pass

- “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 (December 3 and January 7)

Organized by Mito Arts Foundation

Grant: The Japan Arts Council 

Sponsored by: Sony Marketing Inc.

Supported by: Oita Prefectural Art Museum, Yamaha Music Japan Co., Ltd., Kawamata-Music Co., Ltd.,
imura art gallery, KEN NAKAHASHI, Estate of Masaharu Sato, Suntory Holdings Limited

Curator: Yu Iseki (Senior Curator, Contemporary Art Center, Art Tower Mito)

Exhibition Overview

Masaharu Sato makes video works with the “rotoscope” technique in which a person traces pictures on the computer with a pen tool, and Sato traces the ordinary scenery that he recorded with a video camera or a still camera. After having completed the master’s program in painting, graduate school of fine arts, Tokyo University of the Arts, he moved to Germany to study as a research student at the national Kunstakademie Düsseldorf and continued to make works in Germany after he left the school. He came back to Japan in 2010 and settled in Toride city, Ibaraki Prefecture. Soon after he came back, he found out that he suffered from maxillary cancer and kept on creating works while fighting against the illness. In March 2019, he passed away at the age of 45, mourned by many. His works are beyond the genres of contemporary art, movie, animation and media art, and they were well received in and outside Japan. Depicted in his works, created by precisely tracing people close to him and the surrounding scenes which he shot himself, are his unique worldview in which reality and unreality cross each other. Sato used to say that the act of tracing is to “take the subject he depicts inside himself.” The same act can be interpreted as the conduct that deepens one’s understanding of and builds relations with the place where one resides and the scenery in front of them. On the other hand, we on the viewer’s side to his works would feel a sense of gap generated by small differences from the actual pictures and fluctuation of perceptions that seem to go back and forth between reality and unreality. Sato’s works, which arouse many different emotions and sensations in individuals could provide us with depth and richness of the act of seeing.

Introduced in this exhibition are from his first video work “I touch Dream #1” that he made in Germany in 1999 to “Shinigami Sensei” (Dr. Reaper) series which he continued to work on until his death, mounting to a total of 62 works: 26 video works and 36 two-dimensional works to look back on his achievements as an artist.

Masaharu Sato’s Biography

Born in Usuki city, Oita Prefecture in 1973. After completing the master’s degree at the graduate school of fine arts, Tokyo University of the Arts in 1999, he enrolled at the national Kunstakademie Düsseldorf. After having lived in Germany for ten years, he came back to Japan in 2010 and was based in Toride city, Ibaraki Prefecture. He passed away there on March 9, 2019.

His major solo exhibitions include “Bye bye come on” (imura art gallery, Kyoto, 2010), “Hara Documents 10: Masaharu Sato – Tokyo Trace” (Hara Museum, Tokyo, 2016), “TOKYO TRACE 2” (Firstdraft Gallery, Sydney, 2017), “Dr. Reaper” (solo exhibition, KEN NAKAHASHI, Tokyo, 2019). The major group exhibitions include “The Doraemon Tokyo 2017” (Mori Arts Center Gallery, and others, 2017–), “First Lingering Mist of Spring” (Tokyo Arts and Space, Tokyo, 2019), “Roppongi Crossing 2019: Connexions” (Mori Art Museum, Tokyo), “DOMANI: The Art of Tomorrow” Exhibition 2020, “Landscapes in Our Age: Scarred and Reborn” (The National Art Center, Tokyo, 2020), “Yokohama Triennale 2020” (Yokohama Museum of Art, Plot 48, NYK Maritime Museum), “11 Stories on Distanced Relationships: Contemporary Art from Japan” (online exhibition, 2021), “Compassionate Grounds: Ten years on in Tohoku” (Composite, Melbourne, 2021) and so on.

Exhibition's Point

- ① All of Sato's video works that exist are gathered.

In this exhibition, all of Sato's video works that exist today are shown. From "I touch Dream #1" that he made for the first time after he came to Germany in 1999 to his last video work "Fukushima Trace" (2018) which was never finished, a total of 26 works is shown on more than 60 screens and monitors. This is the largest scale retrospective of Masaharu Sato so far.



《I touch Dream #1》1999
Animation, Single Channel video (SD,
B&W, silent)
3min. 34sec.



《Fukushima Trace》2018
Animation, Single Channel video (HD, color), player piano
Loop

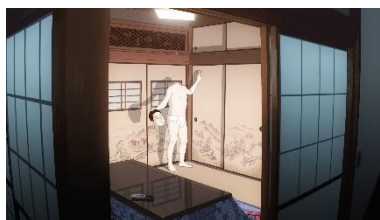
- ② His not-yet-made-public video work "SM" (2015) is to be shown for the first time.

In this exhibition, the work "SM" that was not shown to the public is presented for the first time. In this work, a headless man wearing only an underwear grabs his neck and hits it against "fusuma" (paper sliding door) again and again and it is repeated endlessly. We can sense from this man irritation that Sato must have felt toward his own body while he was working on "Tokyo Trace" (2015-2016) and his impatience toward his production. On the other hand, in "March," which was made in the same year as "SM," different scenes are divided into frames as in manga on the same screen, and each framed scene is on its own time axis as the clock's hands are eternally going around 2:46. It is a meticulous video work which seems to depict a quiet day in March 2015.

In 2015 when the above two works were made, Sato was working on his new work "Tokyo Trace" to be presented at his solo exhibition at Hara Museum of Art in the following year "Hara Documents 10: Masaharu Sato—Tokyo Trace." In summer this year, his maxillary cancer recurred and he had an emergency operation.



《March》2015
Animation, Single Channel
video (HD, color, silent)
Loop



《SM》2015
Animation, Single Channel video (HD, color, sound)
Loop

③ Room of “Dr. Reaper”

After being announced his life expectancy in September 2018, Sato found it difficult to produce video works as his eyesight deteriorated due to the advancement of the illness. However, he did not stop his creative activities and he put his efforts to make two-dimensional works with acrylic paint. He was unable to go out as he liked and spent his quiet hours in his house which was scheduled to be torn down because it got so old. He framed familiar scenes that he noticed and traced them in life size on panels for the “Dr. Reaper” series made up of a total of 10 pieces. In this exhibition, as if to reproduce his old house where he spent his last hours, the series is shown in the Exhibition Room 9, an independent room in the contemporary art gallery at Art Tower Mito.



From “Dr. Reaper” series 《Skull》 2018
Acrylic on wooden panel



From “Dr. Reaper” series 《Night Sky》 2018
Acrylic on wooden panel

Introducing his major works in this exhibition:

《TRAUM》 2004-07

Animation, super 8mm film (transferred to video), single channel video (SD, color, sound), 10min. 7sec.

After he shot everyday scenery with a video camera, he traced them on the computer and made them into animation through the technique of rotoscoping, and this work established Sato’s expression of video works. It took him about 4 years to complete, from 2004 to 2007. TRAUM means “dream” in German, and the work was inspired by Sato’s own dream. The story is about a young man taking a tram running through the town of Düsseldorf, heading for the Rhein Tower that stands along the Rhein River and reaching the observatory.

In this work, Sato overlapped the scenery that he saw in his dream and the scenery of the town of Düsseldorf trying to turn the daydream-like worldview into an animation.



《TRAUM》 2004-2007

Animation, super 8mm film (transferred to video), single channel video
(SD, color, sound)

10min. 7sec.

《BIND DRIVE》 2010-2011

Animation, single channel video (HD, color, sound), 4 min. 50 sec.

This is a work with a drama-like story with men and women dressed up as angels and demons, and it takes place against the scenery of Toride city, Ibaraki Prefecture where Sato lived. The suburban scenery that was mass-produced after the WWII such as paths between rice fields and a row of old houses in the never-ending rain are depicted through his sharp observant eye and the distinguished ability to draw/paint.

After coming back to Japan in 2010, Sato settled in Toride city, Ibaraki Prefecture. As he began to observe the surrounding environment after he started to live there, he found beauty in the lightly populated countryside. By layering the scenery of the countryside one by one, Sato wanted to create an impression that the viewer could feel as if looking at a painting on the screen although it was a video work.



《*BIND DRIVE*》 2010-2011

Animation, single channel video (HD, color, sound)

4min. 50sec.

《Tokyo Trace》 2015-2016

Animation, 12 channel video (HD, color), player piano, Loop

“Tokyo Trace” takes up the theme of Tokyo which was gradually changing towards the coming Olympic Games, and the 90 Tokyo scenes are shown in the 12 videos. There we find the changing Tokyo scenery after the Great Earthquake in 2011 preparing for the Olympics as well as Sato’s ordinary life like a diary. The symbolic places in Tokyo which Sato followed, ordinary scenery and atmosphere are captured.

This work was created for his solo exhibition “Hara Documents 10: Masaharu Sato—Tokyo Trace” which was held at Hara Museum of Art in 2016. In summer 2015 while he was working on Tokyo Trace, he learned about his maxillary cancer recurrence and had to have his upper jaw removed. Later metastasis of cancer was found and as he had to go through radiation therapy and administration of anticancer agent, he could no longer work on his art.

Under such circumstances, Sato found a clue to continue his production by making only the motif into an animation. Before that, the motif and the whole background were made into an animation, but after this work, only a part was depicted as an animation.



《*Tokyo Trace*》 2015-2016

Animation, 12channel video (HD, color), player piano

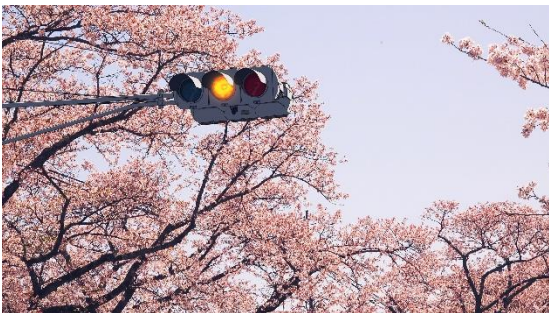
Loop

《Fukushima Trace》 2018

Animation, single channel video (HD, color), player piano, Loop

This work was made over half a year as Sato visited Fukushima repeatedly while combatting the disease. It had been eight years since he got cancer and his doctor told him at the end of 2017 that he could not hope for a complete recovery. Thinking of his remaining days, he decided to visit Fukushima again. What inspired him was an article in the Mainichi Shimbun (newspaper) about the Joban Line being reopened to Tomioka Station. In this work which consists of a total of 30 scenes on a single channel, as in Tokyo Trace, only a part of the moving images is animated. While it shows the towns in Fukushima that were wiped out by the earthquake and tsunami revive, we see the difficult-to-return zone deserted by the nuclear power plant disaster with no sign of life. In this work, Sato captures the daily life in Fukushima, for example, flexible container bags piled up beside the station and people working for decontamination.

Sato seemed to have resolved to make “Fukushima Trace” his life work, but he was announced his life expectancy by the doctor in September 2018 and decided to stop the production of the work. By then, he got blurry vision in one eye which made it difficult for him to trace images, and he was unable to go out to film things as he wished. At the end of February 2019, after half a year since he stopped producing the work, incomplete “Fukushima Trace” was exhibited in “First Lingering Mist of Spring” exhibition at Tokyo Arts and Space (TOKAS) Hongo.



《Fukushima Trace》 2018

Animation, single channel video (HD, color), player piano

Loop

“Dr. Reaper” series

“Skull” “Doorbell” “Outlet” “Switch” “Carton” “Bathroom” “Night Sky” “Gecko” “Stairs” “now”

A total of 10 pieces, 2018, Acrylic on wooden panel, Clock

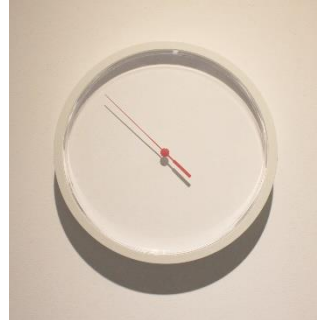
After Sato was told his life expectancy in September 2018, it became difficult for him to make video works as his eyesight deteriorated due to the illness. He then started to work on a series of acrylic paintings, the “Dr. Reaper” series, in which he captured familiar scenery that he noticed as he spent quiet days at home. It consists of a total of 10 pieces: 9 acrylic paintings and a work using a clock as a material. In September 2018, he was told that he had only 3 months to live and he could not go out as he wished. He said, “I couldn’t leave the house. Looking around the interior of that house with renewed awareness< there were things that grabbed my attention and awakened emotions even as I was facing death. Things I had never taken notice of before began to appear precious, and I wanted to render them permanent somehow.” And he was also asked to leave the rented house as it was too old and needed to be torn down. He directed his motif toward his home as he “wanted to paint the existence perishing with the house while not being bothered by others.” In “Dr. Reaper,” taking the same production method as in the past, he traced the motif that had been filmed on the computer and painted it on a wooden panel

with acrylic paint. He added short sentences of his private episodes to each piece, and we can get a glance into his daily life as he was working on “Dr. Reaper.”

The works of “Dr. Reaper” were shown at his solo exhibition “Dr. Reaper” held at KEN NAKAHASHI in Tokyo from February 15, 2019, and Sato passed away on March 9 during the exhibition period.



From “Dr. Reaper” series
《Gecko》 2018
Acrylic on wooden panel



From “Dr. Reaper” series
《now》 2018
Clock

NOTES

Contact:

Contemporary Art Center, Art Tower Mito

1-6-8, Goken-cho, Mito City, Ibaraki, 310-0063, Japan

Tel: +81 (0)29 227 8120 / Fax: +81 (0)29 227 8130 <https://arttowermito.or.jp/>

Regarding the exhibition, contact Yu Iseki (Senior Curator).

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

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

Email: cacpr@arttowermito.or.jp

Information is available on ATM twitter account http://twitter.com/MITOGEI_Gallery

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 029-227-8111 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 Joban Line from Ueno Station (also from Shinagawa and Tokyo Station), Tokyo, and get off at Mito Station. The Express runs every 30 min. The ride takes 65-85 min.

From Mito Station, take a bus from stop no. 4, 5, 6 or 7 at the North Exit bus terminal and get off at "Izumi-cho 1-chome," the fourth stop. Walk toward the direction of the bus and cross the street (route #50) on the first crossing. Walk ahead in a narrow lane in parallel to the crossing. It is a 2-min. walk to Art Tower Mito.

Ticket: Super express one-way ¥3,890 / local one-way ¥2,310 (as of September 2021)

For reservation and timetable, please contact East Japan Railway Company (JR):

Tel: 029-221-2836 <http://www.jreast.co.jp/>

Highway Bus :

Take a highway bus bound for Mito (via Akatsuka route or Ibarakidaigaku route) from the stop No. 4 at the highway bus terminal located at the Yaesu South Gate of Tokyo station.

The ride takes approx. 100 min. Get off at the "Izumi-cho 1-chome" stop. It is a 2-min. walk to ATM.

Bus tickets are available at a ticket vending machine at Yaesu South Gate, Tokyo Station, and North Gate bus ticket counter at Mito Station.

Ticket: One-way between Tokyo and Mito: ¥2,120.

Round-trip (twin ticket): ¥4,000 (as of September 2021)

For details, contact Ibaraki Kotsu (Transport), Tel: 029-251-2331 <http://www.ibako.co.jp/>

Car :

Get off at Mito IC on Joban Highway, and drive toward the city center on the route #50 for about 20 min. ATM is on the crossing of route #349.

Pay parking is available on the basement level of Art Tower Mito. The gate is on the north side of the east end of the ATM building.

Free for 30 min., ¥200 for an hour and ¥100 for every additional 30 min.

Open from 7:00 to 23:00.

For highway tolls and routes, please refer to :

E-NEXCO Drive Plaza "DoRaPuRa" Tel: 0570-024-024 <http://www.driveplaza.com/>