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Tsubasa Kato  
Takayuki Yamamoto  
Ryudai Takano  
Chim↑Pom

# Come close

*Japanese artists within their communities*

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**PROJECTS**



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Curated by Emily Wakeling

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## Introduction

After the disasters that struck the east coast of Japan on March 11th, 2011, inherited social groups opened up to form larger communities defined by the event's terrible impact and the support of many to help the victims. In the face of disaster and the threat of further danger, community and teamwork were valued above all. As a result, many Japanese artists related strongly with the revived sense of community. Instead of responding to the disaster alone, from a studio, artists chose to reach out to those around them and in particular to those in tsunami- and nuclear-affected areas of the country. New, collective-based methods of production resulted in new and interesting work, and this in turn has made 3/11 one of the most important affirmations, if not inspiration, for community-based contemporary art practices in Japan today. Taking its selection from a small number of young artists based in Japan and Australia, this exhibition will be a celebration of the collective over the individual.

*Emily Wakeling*

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*Emily Wakeling*

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**Getting closer:  
in praise of interdependence**

On the 11th of March, 2011, I had been in Tokyo for almost a year. I arrived on my own, as a graduate research scholarship recipient, and struggled to get by in a new country, in a new language, with limited funds. Although I had plenty of friends and family in Australia, they couldn't help me navigate a myriad of practical and social challenges in my new immediate environment. For this, I needed a collection of people who were sharing my experiences, who could offer advice or work things out together; in short, I needed a community.

Naturally, in these first six months or so, I felt alone. I'm a pretty independent person anyway, so this didn't always feel like a bad thing. In fact, after the worst was over I was impressed by my own resourcefulness. Eleven months in, everyday life's challenges were mastered enough for me to feel somewhat settled into a routine. But none of this would have been possible without the help of kind people around me.

The cataclysmic events of 2011 left many people vulnerable. In Tokyo, the damage was far less severe than that of up north. In Fukushima, Sendai and beyond, this was the vulnerability of having one's whole house or town swept away into the ocean. It was the vulnerability of having family members unaccounted for. And as the nuclear power plant crisis unraveled over the following days' live news reports, it was clear that to some degree we had all been jolted by the seriousness of the radioactive disaster and had recognised the potential for further life-threatening danger.

The catastrophes of March 11th (known as 3/11) exposed Japan's vulnerabilities. For earthquakes and tsunamis, of course, we just have to accept their existence. When it comes to nuclear



Takayuki Yamamoto,  
*New Hell: What Kind of Hell Will We Go To?* Tokyo, 2014.  
[Installation view]. Courtesy Mori Art Museum.



Takayuki Yamamoto,  
*New Hell: What Kind of Hell Will We Go To?* Tokyo, 2014.  
 [Video still image]. Courtesy Mori Art Museum.

energy, however, the average person has little understanding of the technology and must largely depend on the assumed reliability of authority figures, of which there is growing reason to have very little trust.

As a result, Japan is vulnerable – but, as my unremarkable story above serves to point out, aren't we all vulnerable? We are all bound to be at some kind of risk. There are all kinds of safeguards in place, be they physical or social, to guide us to the safest path. These safeguards change depending on our age, income, location, education, or physical status. At some point, we will help; likewise, we will unavoidably receive help. And as one person, who is very often aware of her vulnerability, once powerfully but simply put it: help is something we all need.

Sunaura Taylor is an American disability rights activist (and artist) who challenges her culture's emphasis on individualism. Wheelchair bound with arthrogyrosis, she once described the ordeal it was for her to simply go and order a coffee at a local coffee shop in New York City.<sup>1</sup> It was difficult for her to ask for the "special assistance" she would require with the physical acts of paying and holding the coffee in her hands. She goes on to

explain that it felt like a political act for her because this was not special – or exceptional – assistance that goes beyond the regular; it's just assistance. "Help is something that we all need" she concludes.

Emphasis on the individual is something well repeated when contrasting western society against Japanese society. As the American anthropologist Ruth Benedict writes in her study from the days of American occupation,

*The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, "social pressures in Japan... require [the individual] to conceal his emotions, to give up his desires, and to stand as the exposed representative of a family, or organization or a nation."<sup>2</sup>

And while Benedict went on to say that these sacrifices for the collective are an extremely "high price" to pay in order to have reciprocal support from one's society,<sup>3</sup> it could also be argued the other way. In the writings of Taylor, this idea that able-bodied people are, or should be, radically self-sufficient is challenged. Complete independence is an impossible goal for anyone, no matter his or her personal achievements. It ignores the needs

<sup>1</sup> See Sunaura Taylor and Judith Butler take a walk together in the 2008 film, *Examined Life*.

<sup>2</sup> Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture*, Houghton Mifflin, 1946, p. 315.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 294.

of anyone who experiences old age, infancy, injuries, starting families, and other stages of life. The high value placed on being a working member of society, as opposed to receiving assistance or care, results in inevitable feelings of failure and shame for any who cannot achieve it.<sup>4</sup>

While it is far too simple to directly attribute recent art practices, like the ones featured in this exhibition, to the vulnerability instigated by 3/11, it can be a useful launching point to discuss some of these artists' aims. Many artists, upon recognising people's vulnerability, wanted to help those in need. The variety of artistic responses – from the successful to unsuccessful – will be elaborated on in a later essay by Emma Ota. More specifically, this exhibition brings together three artists and one artist group who have made art that recognises that, to some degree, artists and “non-artists,” to use a very general term, are all part of the same community. Everyone can feel vulnerable. Artists can help others, but others can also help artists. The following artists recognise the necessity of interdependence, rather than independence, including in the creation of contemporary art.

Tsubasa Kato is an artist whose body of work has largely relied on the participation of others. His *Pull* project is a series of performances that require the assistance of friends and public by-standers. As detailed in the following interview between Kato and his art school contemporary Linda Dennis, his biggest project so far was conducted in 2013 in Native American communities in North and South Dakota. By enlisting the help of the people of Standing Rock and United Tribes Technical College, Kato was able to create art works that reflected their specific cultural and historical values.

Takayuki Yamamoto is an artist who draws on his experience as a teacher to make art that celebrates the creativity of children. *New Hell* is an ongoing series of projects that enlist a group of young children and prompts them to think about hell. Yamamoto shares medieval Japanese illustrations of hell, as part of the six stages of existence in Buddhist teachings. The children are then encouraged to create their own versions of hell out of craft materials. The process is finished with a show-and-tell style video, starring the children and their creations. In the following

<sup>4</sup> Sunaura Taylor, 'Interdependent Animals: A Feminist Disability Ethic-of-Care' in C.J. Adams & L. Gruen, *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth*, Bloomsbury, 2014, pp. 109-127.



Ryudai Takano,  
*With SM* from the series *With Me*, 2009.  
Courtesy the artist.



Ryudai Takano,  
*With TW* from the series *With Me*, 2010.  
Courtesy the artist.



Ryudai Takano,  
*With KJ #2* from the series *With Me*, 2007.  
 Courtesy the artist.



Ryudai Takano,  
*With MS* from the series *With Me*, 2012.  
 Courtesy the artist.

interview with the artist, Yamamoto expresses his wish for all adults to open their minds to the possibilities proposed by children.

Chim↑Pom are an artist collective originally inspired by the American prankster team of the television show *Jackass*.<sup>5</sup> As untrained artists, the immediate, bold and irreverent acts

<sup>5</sup> PBS, "Art Cannot be Powerless," interview with Ryuta Ushiro for the program *The Atomic Artists*, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/the-atomic-artists/art-cannot-be-powerless/>

<sup>6</sup> Sometimes translated into English as "100 Cheers".

appealed to them. However, 3/11 proved to be a cataclysm for the group, indicated by the themes of *Real Times*, a solo exhibition held just two months after the disasters. Their video work from this exhibition, *KIAI 100*,<sup>6</sup> features one member of Chim↑Pom and several residents of the tsunami-ravaged town of Soma in Fukushima. Under the shadow of a beached trawler boat and abandoned buildings, they huddle in a team cheer, as if

preparing for a sports match. All in the circle take turns to shout out satisfying phrases such as "Let's go, Fukushima!" or more personal cries such as, "I want a girlfriend!" By letting the residents speak, Chim↑Pom prioritise local, non-artist voices over their own.

Ryudai Takano has an ongoing photographic series titled *With Me*. It's a series of self-portraits while standing with another subject, taken in the nude. As detailed in the following interview with Takano, it was his pleasant surprise to find out after processing the images that he and his many participants fed off of each other's moods to create a variety of expressions, from the modest to the flaunting, from serious to fun, all unclothed. What started as a simple colour exercise became a rather more meaningful method of an intimate encounter between artist and those who would stand with him.

Without the participation of other, non-artist creators, the works mentioned above would not exist. It could be said that these artists let themselves be vulnerable to the influence of whoever will help them. The success of the works is significantly dependent on the participation of people; not models or subjects in the traditional artistic sense, but equals. After all, help is something we all need.

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**Pulling us together: a conversation**  
**Tokyo, December 2014**

**Linda Dennis:** Hi, Tsubasa. It is good to meet up with you again. Quite a while has passed since we both studied together at Tokyo University of the Arts from 2008 to 2010.

**Tsubasa Kato:** Good to see you again.

**L.D.** Your *Pull* project is a long-term project of yours since your student days. Is that right?

**T.K.** I made the first artwork in 2007 as my Bachelor's graduation artwork.

**L.D.** I remember seeing documentation of that. I heard from Australian artist, Arryn Snowball, that your theme for that project was love. And I have always wanted to ask you about that.

**T.K.** What? Really? Maybe that's a little too simplified. Which artwork was he talking about, I wonder? Love? Umm... love...? Well, I am interested in people. I like to create relationships with people. So in a really broad sense of the term, perhaps that could be said to be love... But... it doesn't really fit. However, in one of my early works in 2007 that I did with my mother, we pulled a small box in front of my mother's house. That theme was related to love.

**L.D.** So perhaps that was the work being referred to...

**T.K.** Yes, probably.



Chim↑Pom,  
*Kiai 100*, 2011. [Video still image].  
Courtesy Mujin-to Production.



Chim↑Pom  
*Kiai 100*, 2011. (Video still image).  
Courtesy Mujin-to Production.

**L.D.** So if overall, the theme behind your work is not love, what word or words would you use?

**T.K.** I haven't found a word that exactly fits what I am doing, but perhaps the word "relations" fits. But it is large word, and it is a bit different from the word "relational". My work is "action" in terms of "relational" things. I think it is a little different from so called "relational art" so I am still looking for a word that exactly fits my work.

**L.D.** I have been following your work for a number of years, but I noticed a change after the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011. Can you tell me a little about that?

**T.K.** That earthquake was a big turning point for me. Born in 1984, I hadn't been confronted by so many major social problems, so when I was confronted, I started thinking about the power of art, and what art can do. At the time of the earthquake, I was in Osaka doing a project. Prior to the earthquake, I pulled and overturned objects. I was scheduled to do an event in front of Osaka Castle on the day after the earthquake, and the motif I was using for the box structure was a house. It was planned for everyone to pull together to overturn the house. But after the earthquake, that seemed really imprudent, and inappropriate. I mulled over what to do, and as a result decided to ask everyone to pull the structure without making crashing sound, slowly, in a ceremonial way, like a requiem to the earthquake. At the same time, I decided upon the action of pull and raise.

**L.D.** So before the earthquake, your action was of pulling down, but after the earthquake was of pulling up?

**T.K.** Originally I was thinking of laying things on their side, but then was thinking of bringing things back upright. The Japanese word "okosu" which can be translated as "raise" does not only refer to the raising of objects, but also has an abstract meaning of bringing something in being that wasn't there before.

**L.D.** You went to Fukushima quite soon after the earthquake to work on a lighthouse project, if I remember correctly?

**T.K.** Yes, that is right. I went up to Fukushima for half a year to make a new project.

**L.D.** Many people from Tokyo went up for the project, too.

**T.K.** Yes, and many local people were involved. I set the project up with the local community. We collected debris from the tsunami for about half a year, and rebuilt a broken lighthouse, and organized an event to raise it.

**L.D.** What an excellent project it was. It appears to me that the way you were involving people with your artwork changed at that point.

**T.K.** I started to think about issues related to distance. If there is distance, there are things that one cannot perceive, yet they still exist. For example, I have recently done a project with indigenous peoples of North America. I knew about their existence, but there are a lot of things you can't know until you actually go to their communities, to go there and do a project. When I do an event, the place has significance.

**L.D.** Yes, I see. Your work is not the kind of work that can just be sent and exhibited in a gallery. You go to a place, and make the project there.

**T.K.** Of course, photographic and video documentation can be sent to various places, and I have begun to think about this kind of balance of action and document. One rule I have had right from the start for the *Pull* project is that it has to be something that cannot be accomplished alone. So a relationship has to be formed with others. I involve others, and this involvement is not just for pulling the actual box structure, but also is related to how the situation and context is included in the artwork.

**L.D.** This seems related to a question I had prepared to ask: you have always involved people around you in your works. But recently you seem to be working with different groups from before. Does this reflect a change in your concept? Perhaps “change” is the wrong word to use. Perhaps a better word would be “expansion”?



Tsubasa Kato,  
*H.H.H.A. (Home, Hotels, Hideyoshi, Away) 2*, 2011.  
Photo courtesy Mujin-to Production.



Tsubasa Kato,  
*F.F.H. (Fukugawa, Future, Humanity)*, 2011.  
Photo courtesy Sakura Motomura.

**T.K.** Yes, that is true. Distance is involved. For example, there is little distance between my mother and I. People have various points of view, and depending on their point of view, people tend to gather together in groups. For example, the family unit, ethnic groups, and also random groups formed by being in a certain place at a certain time. Groups have a point of sharing of place and time. In my early works, the point of sharing was created primarily by place and time. For example, being in Ueno Park, where our university was located, at a certain time of the day, but for the Fukushima project, the point of sharing was not related just to the time of day and place, but also the era in which it occurred. The project cannot be separated from the events of 2011. Also, for the native American project, the project would be different if it had been done 50 years ago rather than now. I have started to choose the theme of the project to capture a particular period in time.

**L.D.** I saw a documentary film connected with that project. How did that come about?

**T.K.** The Fukushima project was a long project of about 6 months, and after it was done I felt there were certain difficulties... The process of the Fukushima project is the important thing. Photos, videos, and events couldn't express everything. I felt we needed different media for the art piece to exist in art spaces. My activity includes both the process of making, and the exhibition. They are not completely separate. They have some mutual points, but also have different points as well. I make the pieces, and then tend to install them in the exhibition. I wanted to somehow display the process that includes the context of the place or time, and how the art work makes relationships with locals. So I wanted to make a documentary film for my next project. Then my friend, the film director of Mitake Oyashin documentary film, said he wanted to shoot a documentary film of my project. He applied for and received funding to do the project, and then we returned to North Dakota together in 2013.

**L.D.** I have seen photographic and video documentation of your previous projects, and also seen the documentary, and I agree the documentary is able to communicate so much more of the process. It is really wonderful. I think that it is difficult when the piece, the object, is not actually the whole artwork. It is difficult

to communicate that point. The part of the documentary after the boarding school Pull was very powerful.

**T.K.** Thank you.

**L.D.** I think regular fine art video documentation maybe wouldn't catch that.

**T.K.** There is artwork documentation, but it is quite different to this film. I shoot video of my performance as part of the art pieces, and the documentary film is also video, but in the videos I shoot, I don't want to explain everything. I have a limited focus, and want to leave things to people's imagination.

**L.D.** So in the documentary film, it was the first time for a person other than yourself to document your artwork process. It could be said that the filmmaker had a viewpoint different from yours?

**T.K.** Yes, a different point of view.

**L.D.** As for myself, I thought it was a valuable insight, and very interesting. Next month you will do a project in Melbourne. Is it the first time for you to do a project in Australia? What are you going to exhibit there?

**T.K.** Yes, it is my first time to do a project in Australia. For me, Australia is the closest western country to Japan. I already know some Australians, such as you and Arryn Snowball. Australia feels close, and yet it also feels far. It is an intriguing place in the southern hemisphere.

**L.D.** There are many contradictions in Australia, I think. It is a quite isolated pocket of western culture, and has geographic uniqueness as well, with a history related to that. I will be interested to see what you do there. It is a short time to make a new artwork, I guess.

**T.K.** Well actually I will have about three to four weeks.

forms and enters “community”, yet in each case there is a different awareness towards this divide and a distinct notion of community itself. Rather than seek mythic unity or mere shock of hostility, perhaps the possibilities of the artist in the engagement or construction of any community are best highlighted when there is a simultaneous question towards both embedded localized values and those of the deterritorialized universal. When the sense of community is disturbed but not brought to a point of dissociation, when bounds are transgressed wherein easy definitions are surpassed, presumed bonds, identities and icons are challenged and the established commonsense overturned while seeking out the coexistence of cooperation and criticality.

This is what makes the line up for this exhibition *Come close: Japanese artists within their communities* so absorbing as it asks us to consider the distance between the artist and the groups of individuals they work with. While Tsubasa Kato engages with pre-defined communities this is not done merely to erect a symbol of their perceived union but also to literally topple it. Chim↑Pom involves its own community dynamic as a collective identified as “art soldiers” fighting with a particular brand of cynicism which enters the territory of exploitation and points to the futility of the union. Takayuki Yamamoto reveals the absurdities and idiosyncrasies of the social systems and customs by which we become collective social beings by offering a platform to the subjectivity of children, and finally Ryudai Takano who disturbs our notion of a fixed community by the level of intimacy, pushing the bounds of hospitality. The works of these artists come together in a resounding (or should that be fragmented?) call of “How close do we dare to come?”

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**L.D.** You have made artworks within many different communities. What do you think of the title of the show, *Come close: Japanese artists within their communities*?

**T.K.** In one sense, I mix in with, and stir up existing communities, and create new communities through the positioning of my artwork. I draw close to existing communities, and also try to change these. So I enter lots of communities, different from my own. That is interesting to me.

**L.D.** Thanks so much for sharing your thoughts with me. I’m looking forward to seeing what kind of project you do.

**T.K.** Thank you, Linda.

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## **Hell and earth through children's eyes: an interview with Takayuki Yamamoto**

In May last year, Yamamoto sat for a short interview just before a press briefing. His commissioned work, *New Hell: What Kind of Hell Will We Go To?*, Tokyo (2014), was showing as part of a major exhibition at the Mori Art Museum. *Go-Betweens – The World Seen Through Children* featured old and new art about children; not just representations of kids, of which there is a very long history, but rather an artist's desire to portray a child's perspective on life.

*New Hell* has become Yamamoto's best-known series of works, recreated in various locations in Japan and the rest of the world. Out of the many sympathetic and imaginative works displayed in the Mori Art Museum's exhibition, nobody privileged the subjectivity of children quite like Takayuki Yamamoto and his artwork.

*New Hell: What Kind of Hell Will We Go To?*, Tokyo involved the contribution of several young Tokyo residents, sought by a call-out from the museum's website. The objects on display, dioramas made from papier maché and crayons, and their accompanying videos are the result of a 3-day workshop Yamamoto conducted to encourage the young creators to imagine what hell would be like. Their unique creations impress with their diversity and their on-camera presentations were equal parts adorable and surprising. By sharing their imagined hell, the children do indeed reveal another perspective on the world. Their ideas about what is punishable, and what would be a suitably unpleasant punishment, reveal the values they've adopted so far.

The interview started with an explanation of where his idea for *New Hell* came from. "In a practical sense, I wanted to include my reality in my art practice, and children were my reality," began the artist. "After college, I traveled around Europe. But then I had to come back to the real world and start my teaching job in Japan. For many years, I was a teacher as well as an artist and I wanted to include that side of my life in my art practice."

"In the workshops, I behave like a teacher," Yamamoto continued. "I grab their attention and direct it towards the project. Of course, if you leave kids to make whatever they want,

commendable in terms of seemingly reducing the authoritative role of the artist within socially engaged art practices and projects a greater sense of subjectivity amongst the participants, in fact even enacting a constitutive role in the very production of community, yet at the same time one can not avoid the sense of the "kiss and run" model in which the artist is a perpetual outsider, coming and going in a way which avoids the obligations and responsibilities of engaged hospitality, perhaps all too aware of the easy turn from hospitality to hostility. This is of particular concern when working with vulnerable communities, as seen for example with Endo's particular association with art initiatives in disaster-hit Tohoku.

In direct contrast to this method of hospitality is the work of Art Lab Ova in the Yokohama district of Wakabacho. Wakabacho has in fact been nearly erased from the map, with very few even aware of the district's name, it is a neighborhood of "outsiders". With the area of Koganecho, formerly renowned as a harsh red light district, just across the river, and recent movements by the city government to "clean up" this neighborhood through the power of no less than art itself. There has been an exodus of sex workers into the Wakabacho area, further adding to the diversity of a district with a high East and South East Asian population. We might say that Wakabacho is a host to communities which are often denied identity as such; metaphorically and literally foreigners. But this does not engender absolute hospitality. It is fraught with the hostilities of rivalry, racism, homophobia, transphobia, crime and victimhood. But what marks Art Lab Ova out particularly is their refusal to try and represent these groups and individuals, their resistance to formulating fixed identities but rather let things as they are, slowly revealing the great diversity of this area. Having worked in Yokohama for over 18 years and having been based for close to eight years in Wakabacho itself, these are artists who are firmly embedded in locality and yet despite this are still in some cases maintaining the position of the foreigner, or rather they do not claim property to it. In this way they attempt to avoid forced hospitality and rather provide a platform upon which multiple subjectivities may be played out, resisting definitions of who is host and who is guest and blurring the line where the threshold lies.

As we have seen in the above examples the oscillation between hospitality and hostility is always at play as the artist

pertaining to unconditional hospitality by allowing each stranger, each “foreigner” to enter his land and remain a foreigner without assimilation. At the same time he is engaged in a symbolic act of fierce hostility towards the national state of Japan, rejecting its “hospitality” by removing himself from it. “There is no need to destroy anything. Instead, you must doubt the foundations of common sense and change the way in which you behave.

Change your perspective. And continue to think for yourself.’ This

**14** Hiroshi Fuji, Katsuhiko Hibino and Yoshiaki Kaihatsu are highly established Japanese artists renowned for their work which brings different localities into network with each other. Examples include Fuji’s *Kaekko* project collecting old toys across the country and utilizing them in workshops run by volunteers, Hibino’s *Asatte Asagao* project growing morning glory plants in different neighborhoods nationwide and swapping the seeds between each site and Kaihatsu’s *Daylily Art Circus*, a response to the 3.11 disaster through a travelling truck of art and inflatable characters hosted by various towns and cities around Japan in a fundraising drive for Tohoku.

particular comment directly echoes Derrida’s definition of the unconditional welcome in which each individual is able to maintain their entire subjectivity. Sakaguchi has always been attracted to the periphery, the non-space, the other, who may be beyond the sovereign host’s imagination, as revealed in his studies of homeless shelters and publishing of *Zero Yen House*, architectural models and survival skills for living on “the streets”, examining how people seek out hospitality in a highly inhospitable world and revealing the peak of hospitality which always occurs upon the edge of a community, the edge of society.

With the rise of “art projects” across the country, we have also seen the flourishing of itinerant community engaging artists, who have no singular base for this social engagement but flit between one locality to the next. No one embodies this trend quite so well as Ichiro Endo

who in the line of the likes of Hiroshi Fuji, Katsuhiko Hibino and Yoshiaki Kaihatsu,<sup>14</sup> creates networks throughout the country and even internationally, through which he is constantly moving with the help of a crowd of supporters. For the past few years Ichiro has been travelling the country in his bright yellow van with “Go For (the) Future!” inscribed on the side of it. Constantly on the move, this van has become his home in which he opens to anyone who wishes to tag along. He traverses from one location to another, is hosted by one community after the next, running workshops which ask their participants to share their hopes towards the future. The artists above are engaged in laying the seeds (literally in the case of Hibino) for communities to rally together and connect with one another, taking on the project of the artist for themselves and developing it into new directions. This is

they will probably just want to make Martians. As the artist, I create the situation. I want to encourage them to channel their creativity into thinking about what is possible. They start by following me, but by the end, I’ve stepped back and they are in control. I become just the cameraman/director.”

Yamamoto’s method begins by introducing the children to a special part of Japanese art history. Buddhist mandala, or map paintings, from the Kamakura period (1185-1333) were particularly graphic in their representations of hell – a stage of existence, known as jigokudo, that all people must pass through in order to get to heaven.

“I show the mandalas to show that hell is real. Well, at least it seemed real to our ancestors,” explained Yamamoto. “The Buddhists used the mandalas to give an idea of what happens to people in the six stages of existence. Hell is but one stage that we must go through, and once you have passed through you get closer to heaven. If you have been good, hell won’t be so bad. Maybe you’ll just have to sit in hot water for five minutes.”

Upon being shown the fiery, monster-infested pictures, “the children are really inspired, even shocked,” he said. “You can see them become inspired.”

Lastly, Yamamoto answered questions on his experience working with children across cultures. “I hate to sound like a cliché but kids are the same everywhere. I’ve had diverse participants – children from Singapore, from the rough neighbourhoods in San Francisco, from Croatia, and three locations in Japan. But basically they are the same. I can appeal to their need for attention, their desire to have their voice heard, even their tendency to test adults and catch you off guard. As a teacher I know all those tricks. Most importantly, they all offer something adults could never think of.”

When asked what makes children different to adults, Yamamoto asserts that children are the best way for him to create art from outside his own subjectivity. “Whatever the kids make, it will be something new and seemingly impossible to us adults.”

“If I were a kid, I would probably be thinking that maybe Mori Tower [Mori Art Museum’s building] is a transformer,” he continued. “Children are always thinking of what’s impossible, but who are we, as adults, to say what is possible and what is not?”

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## You, and you, with me: an interview with Ryudai Takano

Dressed in a black tie and jacket, Japanese artist and photographer Ryudai Takano sat down one December afternoon last year in a Shinjuku gallery to discuss *With Me*, a series of photographs included in this exhibition.

To begin with, Takano shared the chance story of how the series first came about. “The photos weren’t actually meant to be shown,” he explained. “It was just an archive, an exercise in capturing different skin tones. I am interested in showing diversity in my photography. Even among Japanese, our skin tones are different. These subtle differences were something I wanted to capture. After I’d finished shooting for a previous series in 2005, *How to Contact a Man*, which was also a nude series, I asked the models to stand so that the lens could compare their skin colour to mine. Because it was just an exercise, the series was totally unplanned, and there was no discussion or direction for my subjects.

“Of course, the subjects were a little surprised when I took off my clothes and stood right next them. All I said was, ‘Now I’m going to check your skin colour.’ Anyway, these photos were just a bit of an experiment that got shelved away. But then, in 2009, when I was looking through my body of work, I reconsidered and decided to show them as artworks.”

“I guess, when I first took the photos, it was a little embarrassing because I’m naked. That’s probably why I didn’t consider them for display. But there was something quite interesting about them when I looked again, after four years in storage, that made me reconsider them as art.”

the tendency of that nostalgic union in a form of emergency patriotism. With shouts of *kizuna* (meaning connectedness)<sup>11</sup>, crowds of artists and art professionals flocked to disaster-hit Tohoku, motivated to express solidarity with the people who had suffered so much, with local and national government even creating dedicated funds for art programs in this region. Yet this has also raised various misgivings as to jumping on the bandwagon of disaster relief and playing out the act of hospitality

<sup>11</sup> Kizuna was named word of the year in Japan in 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Kester, Grant *Conversation Pieces*, University of California Press, 2004.

<sup>13</sup> Sakaguchi, Kyohei *Creating an Independent Nation*, Kodansha, 2012. *Tokyo Zero Yen House*, Kawade Bunko, 2011 [a study of structures built by homeless people for shelter].

to displaced people while in fact it is the victims of disaster themselves who face the greatest pressure of hospitality towards the outsider of the artist, a pressure on a community which had lost all. As Derrida points out, there is always a power struggle which asserts itself in the field of hospitality, yet according to dialogical art proponent Grant Kester there still remain possibilities of equal collaboration in which both community and artist simultaneously act as hosts as exemplified by the ‘discursive aesthetic which conceives of the artist primarily

as a collaborator in dialogue rather than an expressive agent<sup>12</sup>, and in which ‘the artist’s identity is tested and transformed by intersubjective experience, rather than being fortified against it,’ an ideal which may motivate many but in reality prove to be a form of “impossible hospitality”.

Here I would like to outline the work of three artists who call these dynamics into question through their different approaches to community, demonstrated in the production of “community”, the networking of communities and the embeddedness within community.

Just at a time when numerous artists were throwing themselves into established communities defined by the locality of East Tohoku, one artist was escaping to the East Japan region to Kyushu, creating as much distance between himself and the troubled Dai-ichi Fukushima nuclear plant as possible, and here set about forming a wholly new community, in fact a completely separate nation. In his publication *Creating an Independent Nation* (2012), Kyohei Sakaguchi<sup>13</sup> details what may be a key embodiment of “hostil/pitality”, wherein the community formed is that of the stranger, with 40 families evacuating from the Tohoku region to join “Zero Center” as a diaspora. In fact, he seeks here something

of *Sharing: Fourth-Stage Consumer Society in Japan*<sup>9</sup> in which he claims the Japanese economy has entered a fourth stage of development since the late 2000s, defined as a “share economy”, particularly reflected by an increase in shared houses, car sharing, co-working offices and open spaces for local exchange, challenging the model of individual property and the highly formalized line between the public and private which can be found in modern Japanese society. With the age range of the population mimicking that of an inverted pyramid there is a pressing need to rethink simple patterns of competitive capitalism and state provisions for social welfare.

One of the results of this is a rising emphasis on localism. With the increasing depopulation of the provincial regions, whole towns becoming shutter streets of disused stores and abandoned houses, art becomes an appealing tool through which to rejuvenate communities, with both local authorities and NPOs alike calling upon the creative energy of artists to galvanize a new movement within deserted, economically flagging areas. The pressing financial and social issues of so many districts has led to a reduction in the threshold of hospitality, a necessity or

urgency to welcome. As community appears to be falling apart there is a renewed call upon artists, outsiders, to reconstruct it. (An equation which may be aligned with the UN forecasts that Japan must welcome 17 million immigrants by 2050 in order to sustain its economy)<sup>10</sup>. Here the

share economy, the economy of community ties, may be seen as an alternative to the spectacle of consumerism, and in parallel to this participatory, community engaged art practices may be positioned as a departure from the dominant structures of the art market and its validation halls of art museums. Yet as we have seen in the rise of social capital within the frameworks of the market economy, rather than being opposing forces community and consumerism are held in collusion with each other to the point in which we have come to consume community.

This trend has only been enhanced by the disaster of the Great East Japan Earthquake on 11th March, 2011. The shock of the scale and depth of destruction provoked a new awareness towards a hospitality in which we must begin to open our doors to our neighbors and accept the notion of the provision and receipt of services between close strangers, again leaning toward

When asked about what kind of subjects he has included in the series, the artist became a little coy: “Well, there is a certain community represented in the series. These are my friends, or friends of friends. You can probably guess what kind of community.” When encouraged to be more specific, Takano remained vague. “Well, I don’t really wish to say. And I don’t know for sure. I don’t think it’s important.”

“What was really surprising about the photos, when I looked at them again, was that our faces are synchronized with each other. Without direction, or without even looking at each other, the expressions on my subjects’ faces and my face are somehow matching. It happened over and over again, with each new subject. Of course, it began as just trying to record skin colour, but there’s obviously more being captured here: the reaction, composition, face, and posture. All of it is recorded. It also captures what happens when two people – who are not family, nor lovers – stand close to each other, naked. And it seems to make some natural intimacy.”

Once exhibited in 2009, Takano continued *With Me* in Tokyo as well as Okinawa in southern Japan. As part of his residency at the Okinawa Prefectural Museum and Art Museum in 2009-2010, Takano sought out locals, both men and women, to continue the series. “Unlike the earlier photographs, my subjects in Okinawa knew what to expect. Again, I didn’t give much instruction, but again, our expressions somehow match.”

In August 2014, the series was shown as part of a contemporary photography group exhibition at the Aichi Prefectural Museum of Art in Nagoya, central Japan. After an inspection from local police, the museum was requested to take down a handful of photographs from the series that featured full-frontal male nudity. The works were deemed “indecent.” Obscenity laws in Japan are notoriously difficult to define. What’s more, in art museums, there had been no post-war precedent for this kind of police intervention.

“We still don’t know if the display of these photos was illegal, even now. Police told the museum to take down the works, but it wasn’t clearly stated that it was illegal. What happened was that a couple of police officers or inspectors came to the museum and looked around. One of them said, ‘I don’t want to show this to my daughter.’ That is clearly a value judgment, not law. It’s a private judgment that was imposed upon the exhibition.”

<sup>10</sup> United Nations Population Division, Replacement Migration, United Nations Publications 2001 <http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/ReplMigED/Japan.pdf>

When asked if he thought the censorship had anything to do with discrimination against gay people in Japan, these were Takano's thoughts: "The police officer who made that remark about not wanting to show the work to his daughter, it could have been a homophobic reaction, yes. It was definitely curious that they should come to the museum at all. Perhaps there was even a double standard, in a country where naked women are on display almost everywhere, but the display of a penis causes discomfort. Two naked men standing close to each other may have had a gay connotation for the police officer. In history, sexuality was a lot more fluid in Japan. Same-sex relations, at least between men and boys, was just a part of the culture. There weren't strict categories such as 'straight' and 'gay.' But now, this is not the case."

Takano's response was to cover the offending parts of the photographs, on top of the frames, with thin archive paper. "I followed orders from the authorities to cover them up, but it makes the spectacle more indecent, more illicit," he explained. "In my opinion, their demand was indecent. Not the artwork."

He also released a statement to a Japanese blog, in which he makes reference to the recent arrest of artist Rokudenashiko on a similar accusation of obscenity and relates it to a larger picture of art censorship in Japan. Here is the last part of his statement:

From the very start, though, I cannot comprehend why "obscenity" is a crime. In our mature society, it is undeniable that a naked body possesses absolutely no destructive power. In another similar case which resulted in an arrest [Rokudenashiko], I do not understand at all what the government was up to. I only know a bit about this work, but it looks to be entirely human, not at all destructive. If we are going to talk about expressions that "harm society," there are any number of more serious examples, yet the expressions that the government continually tries to expunge are entirely proper manifestations of human desire.

In any case, one thing is clear: the government is asserting its presence forcefully through the exercise of such power. If the government deviates from its stated purpose, i.e. to temporarily borrow authority from its citizens, and instead makes a display of this power, that act is far more grotesque than something like the display of genitalia. Once a violence that is not locatable to a specific person begins, it is difficult to stop.

In the interview, Takano again asserted it was wrong for the display of his works to be treated as illegal. "I followed the police

made war-losing Japan eternal hosts to its former occupiers, the Americans, a contract of obliged hospitality towards the US military – the late 90s saw a shift in Japan with an increasing rise in what may be uneasily termed community art, referred to as "art projects" in Japanese English. These models have been led by the likes of international art festivals such as Echigo Tsumari, Beppu Project and Setouchi Art Festival in which there is often a strong local government and business interest linking a high standard of contemporary art with community renewal projects and tourism. Here a "community" is very much an "existing collective" which becomes the host (whether self-determined or not) and must act in a position of hospitality towards the Other, its guests of both artist and visitor. This may be understood as the hospitality of invitation, in which the outsider is requested to temporarily join the community in which certain services are proffered but within set guidelines and expectations. This is a conditional hospitality which the stranger may only receive if they act within the given perimeters. Yet this conditional form always lies in a precarious balance with hostility, firstly the hostility towards obligation and secondly the hostility which occurs when the stranger oversteps the mark. This overstepping of the mark can be achieved in many ways as it tests the threshold of a "community's" tolerance, and it is fear of this threshold which some claim may ultimately limit the criticality and innovation of a project. While at the same time, we observe the limitations placed on the "hosts" themselves identified for example in the dangers of a "cultural imperialism" in which one form of culture, a particular perspective of contemporary art is forced upon another, a concern which has been voiced for example in some parts of Setouchi, a corporate led art initiative which has taken over the identity of the local islanders, leading us to question what is the tolerance level of a community, how far can it stretch until it revolts?

Despite these concerns we have seen a particular rise of this kind of hospitality model since the recession hit in 2008, with an increasing popularity of "share culture" born from both necessity and shifting values, particularly spurred on by the rapidly ageing population demographic. The social scientist Atsushi Miura has written extensively on this phenomenon, concisely collated in his recent English translation *The Rise*

9 Miura, Atsushi *The Rise of Sharing: Fourth-stage Consumer Society in Japan* Translator: Dana Lewis. Tokyo: International House of Japan, 2014.

these two agents, but rather at the moment of a decision. The host must decide how she will welcome, if at all, the foreigner as a guest into her home. Therefore, the foreigner's arrival plays a constitutive role by allowing the host to recognize herself as a sovereign, as the deciding agent.<sup>6</sup>

Derrida points out that there is always “an invisible theatre of hospitality” at play and while the encounter allows for increased awareness of subjectivity, and thus could be interpreted as empowering, he also warns that the tables may be turned at any moment where upon the host may become the hostage. This is the tension, the conflict which is fundamental to hospitality when it is fixed upon this threshold, a strain of power in which the foreign body is at the mercy of the host while also posing a threat to the host's stability. Any welcome is therefore accompanied by resistance, keeping something back at arm's length, preserving a distance which embodies “conditional hospitality”. In conditional hospitality a welcome is extended but only when accompanied by certain rules, obligations which must be adhered to by both sides as defined by the invitation, the contract. On the other hand Derrida also envisions an

“unconditional” hospitality, the ‘unconditional welcome of the foreigner, a foreigner who thereby avoids the violence of assimilation, remaining absolutely foreign or Other’ in which all control all ownership must be given up but in which case there is no longer a territory to welcome into thus placing it beyond our reach, a condition which reflects the dilemma in the relationship between artist and “community”.

So what are the communities of artists? What responsibilities does the artist take in working and building community? What are the motivations and ideological positionings? And what form of hospitality/hostility do they extend?

Having already encountered the collective mobilization of artists in the 1960s in hostility to the art institution (such as Gutai)<sup>6</sup>, and the enforced hospitality brought by the Olympics (as did Hi Red Center)<sup>7</sup> and the Osaka Expo (see Zero Jigen)<sup>8</sup> combined with national uprising against the Anpo agreement – which effectively

instructions because I didn't want to dispute it in court. However, I'd still like to address this issue in public, question the outcome, and start debate.”

“I'd also like to say that I appreciate the museum's treatment of the exhibition in the face of more powerful authorities. It is unusual to find museums in Japan who will even attempt to include male nudity in their shows. Some people, in light of the police intervention, thought the museum was somehow weak, but what they don't know is that this kind of incident hasn't happened before because most museums tend to self-censor. They don't even attempt to be bold. Museums should have more incidents like this in the future; it shouldn't be about hitting the nail that sticks out.”

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<sup>6</sup> Gutai Group established by Jiro Yoshihara in 1954 sought to challenge the art establishment with its dynamic experimentalism.

<sup>7</sup> Hi Red Center's *Street Cleaning Event 1964* entailed a performance of thoroughly cleaning the streets of Tokyo with soap and toothbrushes at a time when there was a drive to reveal how “civilized” the country was through its cleanliness in preparation for the Tokyo Olympics.

<sup>8</sup> Zero Jigen's counter-Expo movement *Hanpaku Undo 1969* included ritualistic ceremonies of near naked performers held in public spaces around Tokyo and Osaka in protest against the Osaka Expo 1970. For further details refer to: Tomii, Reiko *After the Descent of the Everyday: Japanese Collectivism from Hi Red Center to The Play 1964-1973*.

## Where do you stand? Hospitality and hostility, and the position of the artist in the formulation of community

There is an increasing sense of suspicion arising in some factions towards the very word “community”, as if this web of relations impresses an agenda which sways one from their original purpose and in terms of art practice counteracts artistic integrity. There appears to be a fault line growing between different groups of artists and art professionals based upon this very term, for some representing a widening of art to a more diverse population, increasing access and participation, allowing individuals to join

<sup>1</sup> Bishop, Claire *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, London and New York: Verso, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Kwon, Miwon *Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* MIT Press, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Anderson, Benedict *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* Revised Edition. First published by Verso 1983. This revised and extended edition published by Verso 1991.

in creative expression while often tackling key issues in particular localities, while for others it may indicate a muddying of the true essence of art or the exploitative infiltrations of artists into civic groups to meet their own ends in a form of what Claire Bishop terms “social pornography”<sup>1</sup>.

Perhaps one of the greatest fears and attractions towards community is its construction as a microcosm of nationalism, the surmise of “consolidation, wholeness and unity within a community”, an imagined sense of belonging which enforces a certain identity and therefore denies certain other values, demanding an alignment to that commonality in what

Miwon Kwon refers to as a “violence”<sup>2</sup> against singularity. In this way individual identity must be suppressed in order to create the impression of the shared whole, the neglect of singular difference and the prioritization of a mass that when taken to its extreme ends in totalitarianism. Even communities of locality are formed

through Benedict Anderson’s<sup>3</sup> power of imagination and lost in the nostalgia of the communion as identified by Jean-Luc Nancy<sup>4</sup>. The modernist project has shown a direct distrust of community with liberal individualism fighting to maintain the independence of the self, rejecting the claims of authority, tradition, or community, as reflected in Rousseau’s own counter to this through the Social Contract. But Nancy warns us against both the mythic ideal of community, the ‘community that becomes a single thing (body, mind, fatherland, Leader...) necessarily... yields its being-together to a being of togetherness,’ while at the same time negating atomistic approaches which deny ‘any notion of a social world: any sense of a clinamen, that is, of an “inclination... from one toward the other,” a forfeiture to fully autonomous self-contained entities which maintain their freedom at all times. Instead he presents us something beyond these two poles in the form of “being-in-common”, in which there is nothing shared yet

<sup>4</sup> Nancy, Jean-Luc *The Inoperative Society* The University of Minnesota Press, 1990.

<sup>5</sup> Derrida, Jacques *On Hospitality* trans. by Rachel Bowlby, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000. Also refer to Westmoreland, Mark W. “Interruptions: Derrida and Hospitality” in *Kritike: An Online Journal of Philosophy* 2 [1]:1-10 2008.

‘Community is given at the same time than Being and as Being, before all our projects, volitions or enterprises. It is impossible for us to lose it. ... We cannot not co-appear’ (1990: 87)

And yet we continue to construct communities upon the lines of these previous poles in which the very notion of community is based on a threshold, a line between within and without, simply put “us” and “them”, the “home” and the “stranger”. A sense only heightened through the awareness of the Japanese tradition of uchi-

soto, literally inside/outside the group, which prescribes divisions of hierarchy and obligation, openness and closedness, it is the delineation of a territory of hospitality steeped in ritual, which may also be revoked, as seen in the archaic practice of mura hachibu, village ostracism.

Our question is here – How does an artist negotiate or constitute this threshold?

According to Derrida the very derivation of “hospitality” includes its antonym in the conjugation of *hospes* – to welcome, and *hostis* – as in the inimical, etymologically allowing hospitality and hostility to occur simultaneously in a form of “hostil/pitality”<sup>5</sup>. Hospitality involves a confrontation: ‘on one side resides the sovereign host and on the other side, the foreign other. This threshold is defined not in the mere opposition of