

MORNING SESSION

Inside-Out: Realities and Expressions found from Fieldworks around the World

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Since 1992, I have been active in producing and presenting works of contemporary art. In 1998, I received a special award in sculpture in the Osaka Triennale, and with assistance from the Goethe-Institut went to Germany in 1999 to produce and present my works. Currently, I continue to work as an artist, dividing my time between Japan and Germany.

In 1995, a huge earthquake shook Hyogo prefecture, in the center of mainland Japan. This was the Kobe Earthquake that instantly took the precious lives of about 5,000 people, and I saw its devastating consequences. I saw the deep emotional scars left unhealed and the isolation of people dying alone in temporary housing, and took an interest in the social systems governing the aftermath of the earthquake. I have since worked on projects touching on these social issues, using motifs such as inside and outside views in mental hospitals and juvenile reformatories, German concentration camps, and children I met in various countries around the world.

Though I have never set foot in actual war zones, I have been to remote regions in Asia, Europe, North America, and Arab nations. Though the world is supposedly becoming more globalized, there are no differences in the social issues that arise in every part of the globe, be it in modern cities or the remotest of regions. In the following, I would like to tell you the details of my stays abroad, my feelings as an artist, and how my experiences came to fruition as works of art.



1992 First one-man exhibition, started out as a textile artist at the time.

1995 The Kobe Earthquake

Though the city was reconstructed, the shock of the incident traumatized many people, and its effects were particularly damaging to children. This realization made me turn to taking photographs from both inside and outside the windows of mental hospitals. For the 13 past years, I have been producing works using the windows of isolated facilities in various parts of the globe as motifs. By portraying the gaps in people's views when looking outside from the inside of a window as opposed to looking inside from the outside, I want to question what position the viewer takes in terms of the boundary created by this single window, and how we can connect with others.

1997 Art Forum Yanaka / Exhibition in Tokyo

Works using windows in mental hospitals (Light box)



1999 One-man exhibition in Düsseldorf, Germany
 Works on windows of mental hospitals (Light Box)
 → Print photographs on fabric, which are then placed on canvasses and incorporated into the light boxes.

Since 1999 I have owned a studio in Germany, and I also started visiting former sites of concentration camps the same year. This is a view from a window found in the Czech Republic concentration camp in Theresienstadt. It was a hot summer day when I pointed my camera at this particular window, with a vast blue sky stretching beyond the window frame. The people who had once lived here were never able to leave. I felt that countless people had once stood at the place where I was standing, and that they were connected to the person I am now. The terrible reality did not only belong to the past, it continues to be an issue now.

2000 Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art <Memories of Souls> A Memorial for the people who died in isolation



As of July 25th, 1998, there have been 220 deaths in isolation of people who may have had jobs, families, and homes had the earthquake not stripped them of everything. I produced this work because I wanted to say to those who became addicted to alcohol, lost all contact with the outside world, and ended up dying alone, that they will never be forgotten.

2002 I took a plane to Nome, Alaska, a city facing the Bering Sea that is two and a half hours northwest of Anchorage, USA to visit the Inuits. The time was late summer, and the winds blew all day. In this vast land, harsh climate, and with little work available, the young escape to alcohol in desperation. During my one-month stay, there were two murders among drunken young people.

The most frequent crime in this remote city was domestic violence, and I was shocked to learn how the socially vulnerable people, including children, were being sacrificed. All the issues faced by modern society today were being imposed on the children, the elderly, and other socially disadvantaged people. The situation is the same for Japan, where many young people are isolating themselves from society or struggling with depression. It was during my stay here that I thought for the first time that I would like to use children as motifs for my work. By portraying a child with his eyes closed, I am asking the viewer: what do we as a human race want? Where do we want to go? And what are you going to do in this chaotic situation?

- 2003 Goethe-Institut Tokyo / Tokyo <WHAT WILT THOU-MEDITATION>
- 2003 Chukyo University C Square / Nagoya <WHAT WILT THOU-MEDITATION>
- 2003 Kunstmuseum Alten Post, Mülheim an der Ruhr <WHAT WILT THOU-MEDITATION>
- 2003 Mseum Kunst Palast / Düsseldorf, Germany <WHAT WILT THOU - MEDITATION>

2003 I stayed for one month in Yemen, located at the southwestern tip of the Arabian Peninsula

In Yemen, civil war waged between the northern and southern parts of the country over a decade ago, and people were still overshadowed by this war at the time of my visit. I stayed in a city called Ma'rib, roughly 300km southeast of the capital, Sana'a, where conflicts among tribes remain to this day. Trading once flourished here during the era of the Queen of Sheba, with huge temples, vast green fields, and flowing rivers, but has now turned entirely into desert. The devastating scene with the remains of temples and cemeteries in ruins, scattered with bones and trash, made me fear that this scene may overlap with the future of Tokyo.

2005 I stayed for one year in Austria as Special Advisor for Cultural Exchange for the Agency for Cultural Affairs, Japan. During this time, I held an exhibition at the Jugendstiltheater in the Otto Wagner Spital, which is located in the suburbs of Vienna. This hospital is where approximately 470 Austrian or Roma children with physical disabilities fell victim to human experimentation during the World War II. I attempted to juxtapose the present with the past in this place by placing portrait photographs of 18 Austrian and Japanese high school students with their eyes closed in a circle with a diameter of 7 meters. I also presented a light box on the floor, made from color photographs of various windows in this old mental hospital, which dates back to 1902. <Where are you going from here?>



2007 I was invited to stay for one month at Clemson University in South Carolina, USA, for a project to create sculptures using organic materials within campus with students of sculpture and spatial design. The site of the university had formerly been used as a plantation farm, close to Charleston Bay, where black people arrived after being shipped from Africa. After thoroughly researching the area's history with students and holding numerous meetings, it was decided that a place for <meditation> would be created, where various ethnic groups can come together. About 1,000 wild bamboo stems growing on campus were cut down, and a sculpture roughly 17 meters in length was completed. It is located in a quiet area where you can observe the shadows of the bamboo parts moving in synch with the rising and setting of the sun.

2009 I stayed in Montana, USA, from beginning to end of April: more specifically, in a

town called Libby, located in northwest Montana. The entire population of the town suffered from asbestos pollution; about 300 of its residents had died from cancer, and roughly 1,000 still suffer from this disease. Since the soil is polluted, locals cannot grow plants and children cannot swim in the nearby rivers.



I was able to see the current reality faced by the earth by staying in various remote regions, as well as overall social structures and issues and the lives of people. I believe that what is happening now in remote regions is also happening in other parts of the globe. On the other hand, in Japan, where it is difficult to feel the joy of life and which is in a time of instability and uncertainty about the future, many are fighting against despair and futility. This, I think, is also a form of conflict.

I believe that art has the power to express dreams and despairs, extract the reality of the world, and convey messages. My aim is to create art that looks into how people commit to memory the chaotic modern society today, how they overcome these times, and what they are trying to pass on to future generations.

I hope that my works will serve to trigger in viewers the question of why <we are here now.>”