

Review: Aichi Triennale 2013 "Awakening: Where Are We Standing? €" Earth, Memory and Resurrection"

[October 18, 2013](#) by [M-KOS](#)



Alfredo Jaar, Bringing Forth New Life / Umashimenkana (For Sadako Kurihara and the children of Ishinomaki), 2013. Black boards, video projection. Courtesy the artist and Aichi Triennale 2013. Photo: Fukuoka Sakae

The second edition of [Aichi Triennale](#) opened to the public on 10 August in the cities of Nagoya and Okazaki in Aichi prefecture, under the theme "Awakening: Where Are We Standing? €" Earth, Memory and Resurrection". 76 artists from over 25 countries are featured in various locations, spread across five different sites €" Sakae; Shirakawa Park;

Choja-Machi; Nayabashi (Nagoya) and Okazaki. As the title suggests, this event offers a range of reflections on the socio-political repercussions and the environmental impact of the Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011. While artists in the triennale ponder on the catastrophic aftermath, Japan still faces a numbers of urgent issues â€" many Tsunami ravaged areas are still barely re-constructed; Tens of thousands of evacuees from the area around the Fukushima nuclear plant are still unable to go home; tons of highly contaminated radioactive water are still flowing into the Pacific from Fukushima nuclear plant, and the list goes on.

This is the first major international art exhibition taking on the subject matter as a central theme. Artistic director Taro Igarashi describes the festival not as a mere tribute to the Japanese disaster but one aiming more broadly to examine â€œcritical situations where our identities are shaking with the very grounds on which we standâ€œ. An experienced architecture critic and historian, Igarashi structured the festival with an emphasis on ways to engage with space and boundaries, while accommodating nearly a fifth of the exhibition works which directly address the disaster.



Aernout Mik, Cardboard Walls, 2013. Two channel video projection, cardboard. Courtesy the artist and Aichi Triennale 2013 Photo: Ito Tetsuo

Consisting nearly of the same dimensions as Fukushima Power Plant #1, the Aichi Culture Center houses almost half of all the works on show. Architect Katsuhiko Miyamoto cleverly transposed the Fukushima plant's blueprint on a 1:1 scale by marking blue, red and yellow lines on the floors, ceilings and walls of the Center, thus materializing the immensity of the plant, otherwise beyond our comprehension. Dutch artist Aernout Mik's video installation "Cardboard Walls" (2013), composed of two video monitors and a makeshift shelter. The videos theatrically project a re-enactment of TEPCO (Tokyo Electric Power Company, responsible for the Fukushima Nuclear Plant) employees visiting a shelter and apologizing to the evacuees, as witnessed on Japanese media archives. Mik's installation demonstrates the complexity of constructing a collective memory of such an incident, since so many people experienced it from different perspectives, intertwined but divided in emotional states as well as space and time frames.

March 2011 prompted Kenji Yanobe to create a gigantic androgynous "Sun Child" statue, somehow as the culmination of over a decade's work committed to the issue of social survival. The six-meters tall figurine stands on the lowest floor of Aichi Arts Centre, the helmet removed from its yellow radiation suit to better look up into the sky with large manga eyes and a subtle smile of optimism. Upstairs in the same building, Yanobe also exhibits "Wedding of the Sun" (2013), an installation includes an actual chapel ("The Chapel of the Sun" 2013) where willing couples can pronounce wedding vows or similar wishes for the future, in front of another more colossal "Ultra Sun Child" sculpture. While this piece earnestly channels the audience's aspirations, no doubt does it further satirize Japan's dependence for nuclear power with this child-like idol worship.



Kenji Yanobe, Sun Child No.2, 2011. Courtesy the artist and Aichi Triennale 2013. Photo: M-KOS

Despite the major catastrophes of Chernobyl in 1997, Fukushima in 2011 and the countless acknowledgments that nuclear power is an immediate threat to the wellbeing of both humanity and more generally life on earth, recent history has witnessed an undeterred increase in nuclear construction planning. Finnish artist and filmmaker Mika Taanilaâ€™s three-channel video installation documents â€œThe Most Electrified Town in Finlandâ€ (2004â€"2012); the erection of a monstrous nuclear plant over the course of eight years, juxtaposed with evolving sceneries of nearby landscapes and daily life in Eurajoki. The Finnish town folks must feel just like we do now in front of Taanilaâ€™s work: simple observers in a spectacle of fear and helplessness. Under comparable circumstances, British artist Cornelia Parkerâ€™s large-scale installation â€œPerpetual Canonâ€ (2004) suspends a circle of flattened brass instruments in an otherwise empty room. The squashing gesture has not only rid these musical bodies of a third dimensionality but forever muted their voices as well. The haunting quality of Parkerâ€™s installation is magnified by a single light bulb at the center of the suspension circle, casting overlays of shadows onto the surrounding walls, to combine silhouettes of instruments with those of the attending audience, and thus render a breathtaking commemoration of souls lost.

Nagoya City Museum highlights Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar with one of the most memorable works of the triennale. Jaarâ€™s installation entitled â€œBringing Forth New Life / Umashimenkana (For Sadako Kurihara and the children of Ishinomaki)â€ (2013) is a solemn memorial, a powerful voice echoing human sorrow, strength and hope inspired by the artistâ€™s visit to a Tsunami-ravaged primary school in Ishinomaki. Black boards installed in a dark, quiet room glow at irregular intervals by displaying video-projected handwritten message â€œç"ÿã¼ã—ã,ã,"ã<ãª (Umashimenkana)â€, from Sadako Kuriharaâ€™s August 1945 poem, composed in the radioactive ruins of Hiroshima.

Leiko_Shiga_Rasen_Kaigan_Spiral_Coast_2012â€"2013



Lieko Shiga, Rasen Kaigan (Spiral Coast), 2012â€"2013. Courtesy the artist and Aichi Triennale 2013. Photo: Kikuyama Yoshihiro

A short train ride away from Nagoya, over 15 major works are presented in unused buildings across Okazaki city. Most notably, the top three floors of Cibicoâ€™s department store feature large-scale works, including Okazaki-native photographer Lieko Shiga, staging her photography installation â€œRasen Kaigan (Spiral Coast)â€ (2012â€"2013). Here 240 larger-than life photographs are mounted on wooden panels, spiraling horizontally in the entire space. The images, taken in Kitakama (Miyagi prefecture), depict the specific area where Shiga is based since 2008, and continues to live after the events of March 2011. Working as a

community photographer, Shiga chronicles her local daily life through people, objects, festivals and other such chance encounters. The resulting images sometimes adopt a raw and earthy character, others shift to more mysterious or supernatural themes, all these looming within pitch-black backgrounds. In diametrical contrast to Shiga's dark room is the in situ work of local architect unit Studio Verocity, on the rooftop of the same building. The all-white painted open space is at first blindingly impossible to observe without shades, under the cloudless summer sky. The vast expanses of bright surfaces also recall some sort of purgative state of mind, burning empty all its dark recesses.

The curatorial wager to juxtapose heterogeneous elements such as darkness and light or desolation and jubilation is explicitly triumphant in this triennale. The Aichi Culture Centre has for example offset disaster-related works with more contemplative experiential spaces like Goro Hirata's paraffin wax house and architect Junya Ishigami's tiny handcrafted bowls bespeckled with flower petals, sitting on a white circular table. Correspondingly, architect Jun Aoki and artist Hiroshi Sugito collaborated at the Nagoya City Museum to build a quiet intermediate space, with layers of see-through colored curtains suspended from the ceiling, again in opposition to Alfredo Jaar's work.



Jun Aoki and Hiroshi Sugito, The red and blue line, 2013. Mixed media. Courtesy the artist and Aichi Triennale 2013. Photo: M-KOS

Nayabashiâ€™s former ten pin bowling building hosts British artist Richard Wilson, renowned for his spectacular architectural interventions. Here he alters the premisesâ€™ character into an uncanny yet still playful work of art. A single ball intermittently roll on an automated bowling lane, moving indifferently from inside to outside the building through a comic book hole, cut out in the shape of the pins. This ghost-like repetitive action evokes not only the recreational functions of the building but the ball rumbling down the alley also simulates a seismic effect, to provoke a sense of unease in the current context.

Glimmering foam covers the entire surface of Kohei Nawaâ€™s large-scale installation "Foam" (2013), supported on a foundation of wet soil. The bubbly interior landscape continually evolves in semi-darkness â€" alternatively swelling, receding and renewing ephemeral shapes that elicit

the passing of time, a volume in constant flux, to easily recall the volatile similarities between natural environments and socio-political conditions.

A few more international figures investigate such conditions in specific mis-en-scenes, such as Israeli artist Nira Peragâ€™s video "Sabbath" (2012); Australian Angelica Mesitiâ€™s four channel video installation "Citizenâ€™s Band" (2012); Estonian artist Kristina Normanâ€™s video installation "After War" (2009) and Palestinian Bashir Makhoulâ€™s large scale installation "Enter Ghost, Exit Ghost" (2012). Within the larger narrative of the triennale, all the above works urge viewers to contemplate multiple yet coexisting realities.



Kohei Nawa, Foam, 2013. Installation view. Mixed media. Courtesy the artist and Aichi Triennale 2013. Photo: M-KOS

Contrary to popular beliefs, Japan is certainly not immune to the effects of globalization. Its long recession for one has negatively impacted the once thriving textile town of Choja-Machi. But over the past few years,

many artists and designers have moved into the empty premises, which rejuvenated the area and sparked Choja-Machi into a welcome addition to the triennale since its inauguration in 2010. For this edition, comparable cultural regeneration exercises have devoted over 15 sites spread across the area to more than 20 artists and artist collectives (nearly half chosen by open submission) to drive the focus away from natural disasters and economic slump towards more positive outlooks, such as the Nadegata Instant Party's pop-up film studio installation "Studio Tube" (2013). Encouraged in part by the creative effervescence of the Aichi Triennale and the generated international interest, such prospects hope to invigorate the general mood of the nation, akin to Yoko Ono's "Joy of Life / 喜びの生活" messages on the TV tower and billboards spread across the city, bringing buoyancy to a situation that lacks any immediate quick-fix resolution.

Aichi Triennale 2013

10 August – 27 October 2013

aichitriennale.jp



Yoko Ono, Joy of Life / 生きる喜び, 2013. Courtesy the artist and Aichi Triennale 2013. Photo: M-KOS