



S _ Z Art, Cinema, Thought _ Japan, France, China

News ∨ Curating ∨ On Art ∨ On Screen ∨ On Books ∨

Publishing ∨ Pros u0026amp; Cons ∨ MYRRH ∨ About



2020-08-06 · On Art

Interview with Tomoko Konoike





Tomoko Konoike: Flip

@ Artizon Museum, Tokyo
June 23–October 25, 2020
[Click here for our review.](#)

1-How did this project with Artizon come together? How long was the planning for the exhibition?

The preparation period was about a year and a half. The offer came to me in early summer 2018. The Artizon Museum was going to open and start to show contemporary art, and I was invited to hold the first

exhibition. There was the idea to make it a solo show, as well as a session mixed with the Ishibashi Foundation Collection. From there, I started to think about the meaning of “a new museum” and “a session with the collection”, and came to understand that it should be something different from the traditional perspective. The exhibition was eventually brought about with museum staff members exploring the same question throughout the process. We are still devoted to the same question today even though the show has opened.

2- Can you comment/explain further your use of fur & animal pelts (wolves) in your work and tell us how/when you started getting them?

About 20 years ago, I bought some wolf pelts through an acquaintance who works in nature conservation in Mongolia. At that time, tens of thousands of wolves were killed in Mongolia each year as harmful animals. The money I paid for the furs would be donated to the nature conservation organization in Mongolia. From Tohoku and Hokkaido, I acquired discarded furs/ black bear skins, brown bears, seals, and deers, which were also killed as harmful animals, and got them tanned.

Animal fur becomes art material to me because that's what my hands want. I gradually discovered why that was while making works. Art materials are in fact deeply connected to the life of the artists in a way that they don't know themselves.

3- When did you decide to include yourself as a performer in your

videos? what was the process for you?

Since the Tohoku Earthquake, painting as a medium has become unsuitable. The more I paint, the more false, emptier and more suffocating it feels. As I started showing my work in various places in Japan and overseas, I'd immediately walk outside when the installation was done and enjoy the streets or forests nearby. Then took a deep breath. As with sketching, that breath becomes a song to interact with the nature outside. There is no human being in the forest, but as long as my voice is heard by bears and foxes, trees, wind, and clouds in the mountains, the work comes into existence. By singing outside, I realized that the audience doesn't have to be humans.

4- You included some of your well known older drawings of characters you created but no animation film about them this time. Are you still involved in animation?

So called animation is based on the mechanism in which the human brain reads in a lot of still pictures and connects the afterimages to create the illusion of "moving/anima". This illusion mechanism has been fully embodied in the new shadow lantern work. The perspective of animation is not just about moving images, but everywhere around us. Other than the shadow lantern, the elements of animation are also fully incorporated in the Sugoroku game piece and the slide of Fusuma paintings in this exhibition.

5- Did you select the Courbet painting to accompany your show? If yes, why Courbet?

The works from the Ishibashi Foundation collection in this exhibition are selected by the curator, not by me. I went to the collection storage about three times and spent a long time going through all the works thinking about which ones to select. But for some reason I couldn't. It's indeed a mystery that I decided to not select any work. But I think it's an important decision.

6– Based on your experience of making works there, what are the differences and similarities between North Europe and Tohoku in regards to the folk beliefs and practices related to the nature?

Rather than planning my own trips, I travel when I'm offered exhibition opportunities. That was the case for both Finland and Sweden. At that time, I got out of the museum and went on a short trip. I had the amazing experience of howling in Lapland with a wild wolf from afar. Broadly speaking, I feel that both Northern Japan and Northern Europe are the same as Northern peoples.

In Tohoku and Northern Europe, everything is completely covered with snow in winter even if it's something made by humans. It is usually so cold that living things cannot survive outside, and such an astonishing natural phenomenon happens every year—severe, beautiful, and wonderful. Human culture and art in such places are so different from that in the museums built in the city. It has a passage to play with nature equally which is quite interesting. There are many things to discover and learn.

7- what do you think of the position of human being in the universe (among the wild animals and the creatures you imagine)?

An animal, or a participant on the earth.

8- what led you to sing Doraemon in the snow filed in the video work? what is your connection to the character?

It was the work made for The Doraemon Exhibition, 2017.

When I was making a large mural called “Shizuka’s cave”, I constantly felt suffocated by painting, so I went to the snowy mountains in Tohoku, buried myself in the snow, and sang Doraemon’s song.

9- how do you think wild nature influences contemporary urban society? Do you hope to bridge a certain kind of relationship between the two with your work, or is it more of a personal practice?

Nature and the contemporary modern urban society are not separated, but are all connected and circulating. So it is self-evident that both are influencing each other.

My work is not made out of the purpose of “building up a bridge between human and nature” or “for something”. I don’t think it’s a decision I make, but rather the verbalization of how other people see.

Annex question: Do you still have gallery representation in Tokyo? What do you think of the current contemporary art environment in Japan these days?

I represent my own work. When it gets too busy, young galleries might help me with sales. As I don't work in the industry of "contemporary art", my partners or clients are really diverse and unique. I work with people who don't have a penny, as well as those who are non-human.

← [On Yokohama Triennale](#)

[Barely in the Park | Gary Hill's *Momentombs*](#) →
[exhibition](#)

Leave a comment

