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The Rat Patrol



Tokyo-based artist collective Chim Pom was formed in 2007; fifteen years later Mori Art Museum is organizing the group's first major retrospective. Over the course of their career, the artists relied on in situ events and performances, using video, drawing and painting, sculpture, collage, staged sets, and architecture, both in Japan, and, when opportunities allowed, overseas. Traces of two such projects, in Cambodia and Colombia, are included in this exhibition that consists exclusively of *memories*, some as recent as...2020.

It is to Chim Pom's credit that their events were so connected with the site where they took place that Mori Art Museum had to construct *urban* designs for their galleries in order to better convey the collective experience to an audience in the process of discovering

Japan's most famous art group since Dumb Type, and to those who *were there*. Fortunately, and unsurprisingly, this museum has all the necessary contacts, notably the production support of Maeda Road Construction Co., LTD, formerly Takanogumi Co., Ltd. a pioneer of asphalt pavement construction, founded in 1930.

There was a lot of asphalt in the show...



The exhibition raises several interesting questions about contemporary art in Japan, the first being whether or not institutions such as Mori Art Museum are running out of artists if Chim Pom is already getting a show on this scale. Secondly, while much of the

group's art relies on real-time, the traces of its events have been intensely mediated through all manners of mediums since 2007; Chim Pom was rarely *out of sight*, first as a subculture whisper, then reaching the top floor of Shibuya Parco, where once there was a museum, to becoming Shinjuku aristocracy, in the manner of other celebrated figures that have included Daido Moriyama, Araki, and a regular contributor to their events, Makoto Aida, himself the object of a Mori retrospective, *Monument for Nothing*, back in 2012.

In the manner of their famous *Black of Death* video performance from 2008 (1- included in the exhibition), in which members of Chim Pom managed to bring a flock of crows over the DIET building in Tokyo, the first work the audience encounters is their infamous rat-catching video, part of their *Super Rat* project from 2011-12, shot in Shinjuku's happily notorious area, Kabukicho, where countless restaurants throw out unfinished meals and unsold bento boxes. Every night, the rats come out for a feast, and Chim Pom members attempt to catch one, in order to transform it into their own iteration of *Pikachu*. Ceilings have been lowered, lighting is low, it's a tight squeeze from piece to piece, but Mori Art Museum stopped at having an actual rat in the gallery. All of this collective's video work, unlike Dumb Type, a dance-performance ensemble, is solely about *capturing* the event; there is editing, camera movement, and live sound. Their most elaborate media project may have been their moving and exemplary curation of the *Don't Follow the Wind* show at the Watari-um in 2012 (2), following the 2011 disaster in Fukushima, only a hint of which is gracefully presented at Mori Art Museum.

Their 2016 epic work *So See You Again Tomorrow, Too?*, combining some of their best work along with curated pieces inside a Kabukicho building scheduled for demolition, would lead them to gallery representation (3). *Happy Spring* displays a selection of market-situated works, and points to the 'pressed for time' if not weaker aspects of their art when it stands still, from photography to sculpture, what is done with the remains of an event has little of the mastery, both conceptual and practical, found in the work of their sempai, Makoto Aida.



Mori Art museum tells us that *the title Happy Spring signals Chim↑Pom's hope for a brighter spring even amid this seemingly neverending pandemic, and that we retain our powers of imagination even if that long-awaited season arrives in the depths of adversity. In these unpredictable times, the powerful, convention-busting works of this enduring, but equally-unpredictable group of artists are certain to excite the imagination, and serve as a guide as we join in contemplating a better future.*

And yet the closing pieces of the exhibition, devoted to the pandemic and the Tokyo City Government's emergency measures see the collective turning to tropes encountered in previous works, as if running out of steam. The anger, the indignation, and the will to push back are as strong as ever, still clever and amusing, as with the inclusion of a device that allows women to piss standing up, as demonstrated by Ellie, the sole female member of the group, in a photograph accompanying the *Pandemic Pub* installation. As if indicating that Chim Pom, after such intensive output, deserves to take a moment for itself.

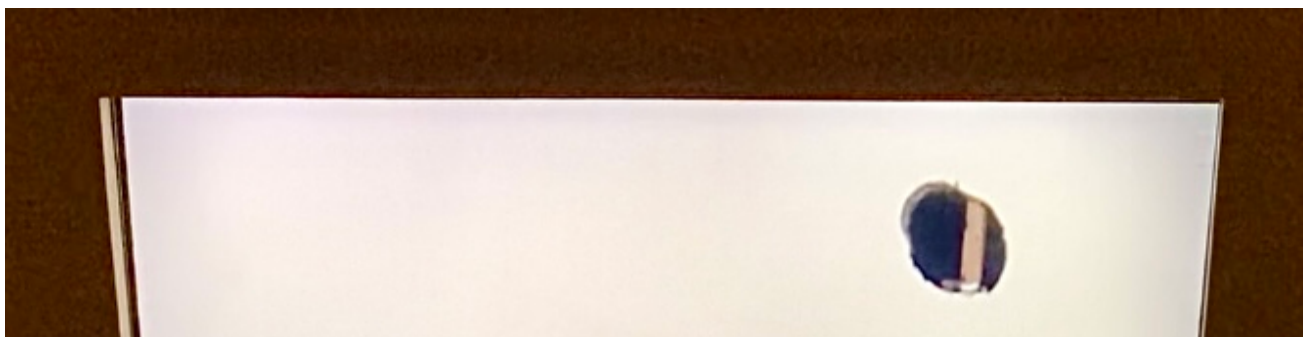


1-<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6iOmEKbCSGs>

2-<http://chimpom.jp/project/dfw.html>

3-<http://anomalytokyo.com/en/exhibition/chimpom-grandopen/>

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← [Review Jia Zhangke on Jia Zhangke](#)
