

whitewall



CURATOR Q&A: REIKO TSUBAKI AND THORSTEN ALBERTZ ON “DUALITY OF EXISTENCE”

“Duality of Existence – Post Fukushima,” a group exhibition of contemporary Japanese art addressing the issues that surfaced after the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami, opened last week at **Friedman Benda** in New York. Exploring the intertwinement of human existence and the Internet as well as human physicality, “Duality of Existence” features seven artists and their reactions to this “new reality.”

Whitewall was able to speak with co-curators Reiko Tsubaki, associate Curator at the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo, and Thorsten Albertz, Director of Friedman Benda, about the themes of this exhibition, their curating experience, and hopes for viewers.

WHITEWALL: “Duality of Existence – Post Fukushima” addresses the most current reactions to the 2011 disaster. In 2012, Reiko Tsubaki, you guest-curated another exhibit (“The Cosmos as Metaphor”) focusing partially on the same earthquake. How do you see reactions as having evolved since your last exhibition regarding the topic as well as throughout the past three years?

REIKO TSUBAKI: Actually “The Cosmos as Metaphor” is not a reaction to the Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami of March 2011, though an aspect of the exhibition is related to it. The disaster reminded us, that as human beings, we are part of the earth and are unable

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to control it. It also reminded us that despite our diminutive status, our existence has the power to terrorize the environment, with events like the nuclear power plant accident. “The Cosmos as Metaphor” encouraged viewers to think about the earth and realize that it is part of the wider universe.

Regarding the evolution of public reactions to the Tōhoku disaster, I think the public is more relaxed. The media is not talking about Fukushima or issues of radiation as much, and this is actually more terrifying for me. We do not know precisely what is happening and are less trusting of what the government says.

It is a good timing to reflect on the direction we should take as a civilization.

WW: Last summer, Thorsten, you curated a very different exhibition that focused on Nightlife. How did your varying backgrounds and perspectives contribute to your co-curating experience?

THORSTEN ALBERTZ: Unlike most museum curators, I don’t have to curate scholarly exhibitions: I have the luxury to put together shows that investigate themes and topics that are affecting me, confront me, or simply interest me. I hope, that because of this personal attachment, my exhibitions reflect my authentic vision.

WW: The exhibit features a variety of established and emerging artists. How do you think the range of the works and their artists speaks to the larger themes and to the aftermath of Fukushima?

TA: We curated the show in a less conventional way: Usually curators target specific artworks and juxtapose them with others previously known works. Reiko and I started with the question: What do we want to talk about in our show? Then, looked at artists who interested us – simply because of their previous work – and invited them to create artwork responding to our curatorial concept. Whether or not variations in age or experience influences the artistic answer to our question, remains to be seen at the opening.

RT: We selected this group of artists because their previous work related to this theme in one way or another, even though each has a very unique position.

WW: In Yusuke Suga’s sculpture *Mediator*, he references Google Glass as he presents a new understanding of information overload. The exhibit also explores the very real challenges that exist beyond the Internet. Do you think this speaks to the recent movements to “unplug”?

TA: If it does, I would be very happy and I would have achieved a goal!

RT: I'm not sure if we should "unplug"... I need a computer and a mobile, otherwise I cannot work or even communicate with friends. But honestly, yes, I believe it is very important to spend time without the internet or virtual communication. I curated an [exhibition](#) ["identity IX" at Nichido Contemporary Art in 2013] where I tried to reveal the importance of the wildness, and to show how human being is only a part of the nature itself.

WW: The show considers several pertinent, moving themes such as catastrophe and human existence. What do you want or expect viewers to take away from "Duality of Existence"?

TA: I would be very happy if people leave the exhibition and think about how much they actually "experience" or how much they actually think they understand something because of videos, images, or other information that they have seen on the Internet. I would love for them to leave the show and think about the duality of their two personas: the one they have while sitting in front of a computer screen and their actual physical body.

RT: I hope that the people would feel grateful to exist, or stay alive, even in duality.