Japanese Art after Fukushima through the Prism of Festivals

Clélia Zernik

Translator: Phoebe Clarke

Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/27197>

DOI: 10.4000/critiquedart.27197

ISBN: 2265-9404

ISSN: 2265-9404

Publisher

Groupeement d'intérêt scientifique (GIS) Archives de la critique d'art

Printed version

Date of publication: 21 November 2017

Number of pages: 105-120

ISBN: 1246-8258

ISSN: 1246-8258

Electronic reference

Clélia Zernik, « *Japanese Art after Fukushima through the Prism of Festivals* », *Critique d'art* [Online], 49 | Automne/hiver 2017, Online since 21 November 2018, connection on 01 May 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/27197> ; DOI : 10.4000/critiquedart.27197

This text was automatically generated on 1 May 2019.

EN

Japanese Art after Fukushima through the Prism of Festivals

Clélia Zernik

Translation : Phoebe Clarke

EDITOR'S NOTE

“Japanese Art After Fukushima through the Prism of Festivals”, a paper by Clélia Zernik, is the result of an original collaboration between the Institut français, the Institut national d’histoire de l’art and *Critique d’art*, who together decided to create a new grant for the writing and publication of a critical essay.

There will be a call for applications every year for this grant, which was launched in 2016 and is part of a wider programme to support writing on contemporary art and its international visibility. It was initiated by the Institut français in the field of visual arts, in partnership with the French Ministry of Culture - Artistic Creation Department. A three-year cycle was thus created which, through different measures, encourages the mobility of researchers and art critics, as well as the circulation of their ideas and translations of their work.

The first recipient of this grant for critical writing, Julie Crenn, travelled to South Africa to examine the African art scene through the eyes of female artists¹. Clélia Zernik, the present awardee, focuses on works and the frame within which they are shown, in this fascinating investigation of contemporary art festivals in Japan. Avoiding the easy option of a comparative approach, her careful descriptions offer the reader a close-up experience of these events, whose singularity is gradually revealed. One of the qualities of this paper is that it makes clear that far from being limited to the restricted field of contemporary art experts, these festivals give structure to geographical areas and social spaces, within a long-term, slow, shared temporality. We hope you enjoy this article! Elitza Dulguerova, Research adviser in the field of 18th to 21st-Century Art History, INHA and Vincent Gonzalez, Head of the Visual Arts and Architecture Department, Institut français.

Japan Alps Art Festival 2017, collectif Mé

© TSUYOSHI HONGO

- 1 Visitors to the Japan Alps Art Festival 2017, carrying a map listing all the different itineraries (blue, red and green), the recommended stops ranked from 1 to 38; and especially the different dining options including a detailed description of the local specialities, may be surprised, on exiting the Shinano-Omachi station, to find themselves surrounded by a crowd of women, elderly couples and families wearing hiking boots and backpacks. Nothing here is suggestive of the Meccas of contemporary art, Kassel or Venice, and their procession of professionals, journalists and rich collectors. Everyone here seems to be getting ready for a giant school excursion, jotting down its different stages on their precious map.
- 2 The Japan Alps Art Festival in Shinano-Omachi is one of the nearly 200 art festivals that take place every year in Japan. This trend has been so successful in the past ten years that some people even speak of a Japanese “festival bubble”. These contemporary art festivals, of which there are more every year in different Japanese localities, develop a new concept, at the intersection of mass tourism and elitist events for extremely contemporary art, fusing gastronomy, local history and popular gatherings, offering all at once a unique exotic experience, an all-inclusive vacation programme and an original tourist attraction. The festival’s catalogue mentions the different choices of *ramen*, the price of canoe-kayak lessons and the latest works by Christian Boltanski and James Turrell, further accentuating the impression of confusion.
- 3 How should one understand the exponential development of this form of artistic event within the specific context of Japanese art? How should one appreciate its hybridity? Is it only a business operation or does it, on the contrary, open new spaces for artistic creation? A detailed study of the festivals’ programming helps assess the limits of this approach as well as the revitalising freshness of proposals that could never have existed elsewhere. They become a particularly sharp microscope with which to examine the

changes in extremely contemporary art, from which it can indeed be difficult to sufficiently distance oneself.²

Sapporo International Art Festival 2017, Yoshihide Otomo + Yasutomo Aoyama + Takayuki Ito,
(With) Without Records

© KOMAKI YOSHISATO, WITH COURTESY OF SAPPORO INTERNATIONAL ART FESTIVAL

Artistic festivities

- 4 The word “festival”, when used in Japanese, has Western connotations. The Japanese word *matsuri* is used to describe festivities that honour the gods, which are not so much associated to dates than they are to places, since each locality has its own calendar. Japanese contemporary art “festivals” borrow from *matsuri* their local nature as well as their festive, participative and popular dimensions. Nicolas Bouvier describes *matsuri* as “festivals where everyone joins together in the same expectations and the same feelings, and where you would search in vain for someone not in touch with them.”³ *Matsuri* is the expression of a social consensus which leaves no room for criticism, evaluation or debate. The Westernisation of the word hybridises its connotations, evoking all at once a great Western-style art event, and a local festival where everyone comes together to eat, dance and play. It is probably the combination of these two meanings that makes some aspects of Japanese art festivals so totally new and difficult to assess for Western critics.
- 5 Japanese art festivals often develop around museums. This is particularly the case for the Setouchi Triennial, which precisely became famous for the permanent architecture that became its symbol (somewhat outshining the 240 ephemeral artworks that were displayed, for the 2016 edition, on twelve islands of the Inland Sea archipelago): the Chichu Art Museum, designed by Tadao Ando on the island of Naoshima, hosted works by James Turrell, Claude Monet and Walter de Maria. This maze-like building alternates luminous views on the sky and an almost religious half-light; in the Inujima Seirenscho Art Museum, designed by architect Hiroshi Sambuichi, the artist Yukinori Yanagi weaved Yukio Mishima’s literary and political legacy together with the island’s industrial past;

the Teshima art museum, designed by Ryue Nishiwaza, displayed the poetic and minimalist work of Rei Naiti. Similarly, the festival of Echigo-Tsumari is centred around the KINARE contemporary art museum, just as the Sapporo festival is centred around the historical Moerenuma park and its museum, which are famous for the works by American-Japanese artist Isamu Noguchi they display.

- 6 However, the festivals develop from these permanent cores as consciously multi-centred and changing events. The 2017 Yokohama Triennial deliberately displayed its own fragmentation, by holding a day-long symposium on this new kind of artistic event, which is increasingly popular across Asia as well as Japan.⁴ Therefore it is necessary to consider the origins of this unique form and its specificities.

Sapporo International Art Festival 2017, Yuko Mohri, *Breath or Echo*

© KOMAKI YOSHISATO, WITH COURTESY OF SAPPORO INTERNATIONAL ART FESTIVAL

Art tourism and social art

- 7 Although art festivals have multiplied since the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011, they started developing several years earlier, as a repercussion of the bursting of the economic bubble and the feeling of fragility ensuing from the Kobe earthquake and the sarin gas attacks in the Tokyo subway in 1995. At the root of this trend is the personal and singular initiative of one man, Fram Kitagawa. In 2000, after several years spent negotiating with local inhabitants, he inaugurated a new kind of festival, the Echigo-Tsumari Triennial in the Niigata region north of Tokyo. This area was typical of rural Japan, and suffered from strong demographic decline. It also experienced the heaviest snowfalls in the country and, consequently, was isolated. The Echigo-Tsumari Triennial was supposed to revitalise the region, that covers over 760km² (and has only 100.000 inhabitants), making it attractive again by concentrating an influx of investments and visitors. But art was not only considered here as the social and economic tool for rural revitalisation: Fram Kitagawa developed his concept of art in total opposition to what was triumphantly

taking place in modern metropolises (the Mori Museum on the 52nd floor of the Mori tower in Tokyo, Takashi Murakami's success in the art market or Yoshitomo Nara's viral celebrity). According to Fram Kitagawa, visiting the Echigo-Tsumari festival is a slow process, because of the huge distances that must be covered to see artworks in out-of-the-way, hidden and difficultly accessible locations. Visitors and art professionals must take their time and face the disappointments of this gigantic "impossible treasure hunt"⁵. Before finally arriving at one of the 150 exhibitions programmed by the festival, they must travel for days on winding mountain paths that branch off onto forest tracks, where one must carry a small bell to scare the bears away. It is impossible to experience the whole festival: "slow art", says Fram Kitagawa, is the cure for the "sickness" created by the speed and consumerism of urban ways of life.⁶ Art should once more become an object of desire, a search characterised by an essential slowness that cities and their rhythm have cut us off from.

- 8 In this respect, the experience can even prove disappointing when the artwork which is finally discovered after a long trip is unfinished or still a project. On the huge map marking the different artworks, workshops for children or the elderly, food tastings organised by secondary-school students from Hong Kong, rice ball exchanges (*The Onigiri Rice Ball Circle*), installations that are still being constructed and remain quite mysterious, perceptive artworks intended for children (chicken coops by artists or giant soap bubble machines) are all placed on the same level.
- 9 Confusingly, the spectator's ability to play and marvel is called upon just as much as purely aesthetic appreciation is. The Echigo-Tsumari festival offers samples of multiple and heterogenous forms that level out all existing approaches. In this too it contradicts urban exhibition methods that favour the White Cube and its radical separation of the finished work from the process of its making.
- 10 Fram Kitagawa's approach is social and participative, in line with his left-wing, slightly traditionalist idealism. In this huge territory devoted to art, monumental *in situ* works have been installed (such as the Kabakov's piece in the terraced rice fields). Abandoned houses and schools have been taken over in more or less long-term ways. Following one of the teachings of Tadashi Kawamata, with whom Fram Kitagawa frequently works with, the artwork is to be found in the process rather than in its result. Jean-Luc Vilmouth's *Café Reflet* consists of photographs of local inhabitants taken over the course of four seasons; *Little Utopian House* by Jean-Michel Alberola houses the thoughts of thirteen residents of the small village of Koyamaru and resulted in the production of two feature films. The meaningful unit here, it seems, is the process and not the finished artwork: interviews lead to the architectural construction and to the making of one film and then the other, the whole thing finds its rhythm and develops through the relationship the artist creates with the local community. Katsuhiko Hibino's *The Day After Tomorrow* project also displays the circular and reflexive nature of the Triennial: in an old disused school, a newspaper is published that lists the events in the villagers' lives during the period of the festival, changing our understanding of journalism and its taste for sensationalism, and making possible the writing of another history. It is worth recalling that the Echigo-Tsumari festival was launched in 2000. The idea for it was born in the context of the 1990s, which witnessed the end of the Japanese dream after the financial bubble burst. The festival is a utopian concept, a new way of conceptualising our relationship to the world after years of prosperity and excessive consumerism; another possible world, dreamt in common, that artists would be among the first to build. Fram

Kitagawa led a very left-wing youth. Although the different festivals inevitably take on commercial dimensions, nonetheless they still are like these old left-wing dreams come true. Fram Kitagawa says so himself: “perhaps there are some aspects of the Triennial that include a dimension of folk art or art de vivre that is distasteful to the sensitivity of purists. But Echigo-Tsumari is deliberately in line with an approach that is at the service of visitors and that makes art part of life.”⁷

- 11 A festival like Echigo-Tsumari is deeply different from international art biennials because of its participative dimension and the fact that it includes local residents in its approach. For instance, in 2003, in order to install his *Bonkei II* project in the middle of rice fields, the artist Hiroshi Furugori asked the village’s residents for their help during three rainy weeks, transforming the work into the villagers’ rather than his own. Throughout the years, one golden rule has been upheld that prevents the festival from becoming a neutral exhibition space: the artists must always present their project to the town council and directly ask the residents for their approval. The works are thought from within the locality’s reality, they are not external ideas imposed from above.
- 12 Many other festivals, more or less faithful to Fram Kitagawa’s initial philosophy have been created according to this model. This enthusiasm can partly be explained by the financial profit generated by this kind of event. City or regional councils, that only have limited budgets, will chose to organise festivals rather than starting large-scale construction projects for example. Moreover, when an idea is successful in Japan, it usually develops in a viral way: thus the exponential increase in festivals. The general public often feels very uneasy in relation to contemporary art because it seems incomprehensible. Showing it in the reassuring space of the Japanese countryside helps viewers feel less daunted. Festivals are also connected to an economy of cultural mediation, initiated by post-war department stores that helped compensate the flaws in cultural policies and the lack of museums.⁸ One problem remains: the lines between pedagogy, didacticism and demagogy are often very fine.

Sapporo International Art Festival 2017, Satoshi Hata, *Intention and substance*

© KOMAKI YOSHISATO, WITH COURTESY OF SAPPORO INTERNATIONAL ART FESTIVAL

Local or global? The equivocations of Japanese contemporary art

- ¹³ These different festivals, from Western-style biennials to traditional *matsuri*, should be understood as a complex continuity. Some of these events are indeed very close to Western art fairs, for example the Tokyo Art Fair, which is held every year and welcomes many visitors but too few buyers, and the Yokohama Triennial, which ever since its first edition in 2001 is typical of the difficulties Japanese artists encounter when trying to exist on the international scene. Japan was slower than Shanghai (1996), Taipei (1998) and Busan (1998) to enter the biennial/triennial game.⁹ The problem with these Asian art biennials was that they were organised by Western curators and consequently did not necessarily really provoke the shift they seemed to promote. Yokohama, the country's second largest city and a port with a long-standing tradition of openness to the world, was the first to organise such an event, aiming to leave the Western model behind. As Adrian Favell wrote with great precision in *Before And After Superflat*¹⁰, Yokohama 2001 was the first Asian triennial that did not have a Westerner at its head and that showed a majority of Japanese and Asian
- ¹⁴ artists. With the help of the Japan Foundation, the event was a huge success with 300.000 visitors, including many foreigners. The Yokohama sea front could rival with the Venice Arsenal. Its second edition was also a success, albeit in a completely different context. Because of disagreements and insufficient funding, it was postponed for a year and was then entrusted at the last minute to Tadashi Kawamata, who transformed the pieces' incompleteness and the lack of resources into a very interesting "work in progress" proposal, that however had no real international visibility. In 2008, Western curators took control of the event and transformed it into a showcase for international art rather than

a springboard for Japanese artists. Contemporary Japanese art does in fact suffer from a chronic lack of recognition, funding and space. This is the meaning behind artist Tsuyoshu Ozawa's backpack gallery (Nasubi Gallery). The 2017 Yokohama Triennial, caught between an unspecifically Japanese international event and a Japanese version with little international recognition, seems to ironically settle the question. Under the title *Islands, Constellation, and Galapagos*, it champions Asian artists, is orchestrated by Japanese curators and claims it is necessary to go back to smaller human groups and to adapt our actions to smaller scales. Japan, that for a long time was humorously nicknamed *Galapagos*, as a reference to the brand of a certain type of mobile phone that only worked inside Japan, now seems to reclaim its singularity and its isolation. Incidentally, the *Galapagos* model also implicitly partakes in the Echigo-Tsumari model, which, for some, points towards the possibility of a new *sakoku* (the separation of Japan from the rest of the world and its closing in on itself), as was the case during the pre-modern era¹¹. In Yokohama, Echigo-Tsumari and other regional festivals, there is a huge gap between these events which are celebrated in Japan and seldom recognised abroad (and where no foreign visitors or journalists are to be seen). To some extent, the development of local festivals can be explained as a result of the semi-failure of international-scale triennials. However, this withdrawal does not mean closing up to others, but investing a narrower field of action, revitalising localness and aiming for a different future. This is one of the lessons of the 1990s bust and of the Fukushima nuclear disaster. We cannot control the world in its totality, instead, we must change scales and methods of action. Kiyokazu Washida, on the occasion of the 2017 Yokohama Triennial, wrote: "The time has come for regions to become self-sufficient, not as the different branches of a main trunk, but as the different trees of one forest. [...] I am very curious to see what new worlds can spring forth from this conception." Similarly, the 2016 Aichi Triennial, centred on the city of Nagoya, valued diversity and differences, challenging a monolithic view of the world. Directed by artist and professor Chihiro Minato, its title (*A Rainbow Caravan*) and content encouraged the visitor to contemplate rebirth after disaster in the form of a political utopian change, appointing nomadism as the alternative to a globalised world view. The Reborn Art Festival 2017 actually transformed the desire for reconstruction into a festival that takes place on the Tohoku coast, which was devastated by the tsunami in 2011, and more particularly around the town of Ishinomaki. It holds a special position in the typology of festivals because it was autonomously organised, in Tokyo, by the Watarium gallery. Like in a large-scale contemporary art event, the selected works are first-rate (Kohei Nawa, Nam June Paik, Rudolf Steiner, Aiko Miyanaga...), but seem intended for the Tokyo art world audience rather than the local population. In contradiction with Fram Kitagawa's philosophy, the area seems to passively host an event imposed from above. However, it does prove that the whole country stands united with this ravaged region.

- 15 Musician Yoshihide Otomo, who lived in Fukushima during his teenage years, undertook something which was very different from the Reborn Art Festival's strategy. After the 2011 disaster, Yoshihide Otomo started the *Fukushima!* festival which is held every 15th of August, the traditional day of the dead or *O-bon matsuri*. Yoshihide Otomo always opens the festival with a traditional *O-bon* dance, in order to integrate the event into popular tradition. Creating an occasion for people to come to Fukushima is one of the core aims of the festival. Ever since the nuclear incident, the region is either avoided altogether or at the heart of a macabre and voyeuristic kind of tourism, sometimes even organised by tour

operators. *The Fukushima!* festival tries to avoid these pitfalls by giving good reasons to come to Fukushima.

- 16 Besides festivals that are centred on cities, there are also, along the lines of Echigo-Tsumari, festivals which focus on the exploration of a region's natural and historical heritage. This is the case, for instance, of the famous Setouchi festival, that seeks to revitalise the islands of the inland sea, which suffer from advanced depopulation and excessive industrialisation. Like Echigo-Tsumari, where Fram Kitagawa, the artistic director, organises installations in houses, schools, temples, ports and rice fields; or the Japan Alps Arts Festival, Kitagawa's 2017 project, where the artworks are sometimes only the pretexts that encourage visitors to travel a long way in order for them to admire Japan's most beautiful vantage points, lake Kizaki or mount Takagari. One might wonder what justifies this annexation of art to tourism, and whether the area in fact needs this extra artistic investment: the natural sites are stunning enough on their own.

Japan Alps Art Festival 2017, Tadashi Kawamata, *Terrace in a bush*

© TSUYOSHI HONGO

A Japanese specificity or the latest transformation of “relational art”?

- 17 Despite the strong social consensus that surrounds them, several negative comments can be made about these festivals. To what extent do the economic profits benefit local populations? For instance, in the case of the Echigo-Tsumari festival, even though beneficial economic and population movements take place over the course of the festival, no long-term revitalisation of the area has been noted outside of the festival dates. Alone, the festival cannot check rural exodus, except for a rather inconsequential tendency to gentrification, with young urban dwellers moving to the area. Moreover, might not displacing works to contexts that are not entirely intended for them have negative

effects? Even though most of the time the works are imagined *in situ*, others are moved for the exhibition and lose their power in comparison to the huge scale of the natural sites. But the main criticism that can be uttered regarding this type of event concerns their heteronomous conception of art. In these contexts, art is a means to an end that is distinct from itself: revitalising a region (Niigata, the Setouchi islands, the devastated Tohoku coast), the expectations of tourists and hikers, the economic ambitions of city councils. In his *Critique of Judgment*, Immanuel Kant precisely defined aesthetic pleasure by its autonomy, by the absence of economic or social interference: a castle can only please us aesthetically independently of all considerations on the political regime that commissioned it. On the contrary, these festivals have an objective and extra-artistic goal: the social relation it creates. Art becomes useful, interested, political and heteronomous. However, this criticism seems to miss the point. As highlighted by Kitagawa, the question of the autonomy and purity of art is a purely Western outlook. Japanese history never compartmentalised fine art versus applied or functional art in this way. “Everything that is made by the human hand is art”¹², writes Kitagawa. The criticism of impure art falls under a Western categorisation that is not necessarily relevant to Japanese forms of art (*ikebana*, the art of kimonos and ceramics, for instance, are not defined in opposition to function)¹³. In a wider sense, all of so-called relational art — that is, an art form whose finality is the human relationship it creates — has been criticised in the same way. The specificities of Japanese art could be taken into account in the debate about relational arts and its criticism by Claire Bishop¹⁴ and Eleanor Heartney¹⁵. But, to Adrian Favell’s surprise¹⁶, Japan is never used as evidence in this debate. On the contrary, it appears to have adopted so-called “relational” art for different reasons and through different means. In short, it was not because of ideological reasons or a conceptual position that Japanese artists turned to collaborative art forms, but through historical necessity and different traditions. The example of photographer Naoya Hatakeyama is quite eloquent in this respect. After the tsunami destroyed his hometown, Rikuzentakata, he wondered what he could do for the residents, even though his photographic practice had always been autonomous and classic, without any special social aim. He realised that as a photographer, he could keep the memory of his region alive, and that in this sense, he too was useful. These two aspects are not necessarily contradictory: a work of art can be beautiful in an absolute sense, all the while maintaining a social function in a determined context. Therefore, we will discuss particularly successful works. Even though they depend on the context of the festival for which they were imagined, they are nonetheless radical and absolute.

Yokohama Triennale 2017, Yukinori Yanagi, Project Godzilla The Basement of Yokohama Port
Opening Memorial Hall

© KATO KEN

A laboratory for a new art scene

- 18 The sheer scale of the events means that these festivals are becoming the territory and space that Japanese artists have been insistently demanding for contemporary art ever since the mid-20th century. Festivals are spaces of experimentation, open-air and large-scale studios that make it possible to observe recurring trends, patterns and world views that define a generation. As it happens, ever since March 11th 2011, the production of *superflat* and pop art, centred on individual “worlds”¹⁷, has decreased, and forms involving political and participative commitment, on the other hand have appeared, redefining smaller-scale and less ideological interventions.
- 19 Since then, themes such as rebirth and new beginnings are at the heart of the festivals. At the Reborn Art Festival, on Norihama beach, artist Shimabuku stood wreckage from the tsunami back on its feet again. This beautiful and powerful installation, called *Placing Things Straight*, helps the landscape and objects regain balance. Reconstruction means moving from passivity to action. It also means outlining the coming world. Tadashi Kawamata’s process also falls in with this light architectural vision, which, instead of displaying spectacular installations, sketches proposals that are never fully carried out. Tadashi Kawamata, acting more as a landscape designer than as an architect, traces the ideal outlines of utopian constructions, such as a terrace winding among the trees at the Japan Alps Art Festival.
- 20 However, in the prefix “re” found at the beginning of such words as rebirth or rebuild, there remains a memory or a trace of the trauma¹⁸. Memories are central for the Reborn Art Festival that takes place on the very site of Tohoku that was destroyed by the tsunami. The tsunami needs a monument that reminds of but also goes beyond traumas

and stigmas: the giant statue of a deer that Kohei Nawa modelled from pixelating stuffed deer he bought off the Internet is this monument. The material he uses is white and sparkles in the sunlight, evoking an immaculate future, whereas the deer's antlers, which seem to still be growing, recycle the patterns of the wooden wreckage left by the tsunami, lifting it to the sky. Like a lighthouse at the end of a jetty, the deer symbolises the hopefulness the curators wanted to express. It is the only permanent work of the festival, and it functions as a monument, exalting the surrounding landscape, all the while creating a feeling of peace, which perhaps comes from its half-abstract, half-concrete form.

- 21 The work of activist art and agitation collective Chim Pom is yet another kind of monument, whose radicalness and economy are quite surprising. The installation is displayed underground and it is necessary to cover up warmly before visiting it. After a short journey downwards, visitors find themselves in a dark refrigerated room, in the middle of which a teardrop is lit up like a piece of jewellery under a glass case. The -9°C temperature that is continually maintained keeps the teardrop frozen. This monument to families that have lost loved ones to the tsunami is said to have been created from the real teardrops – be they tears of sadness or joy – of local denizens. The teardrop, which is all at once solid, crystalline, precious, fragile and resistant, is radiant because of its very tenuousness. The beauty and fugacity of this world are materialised underground, in the very place where corpses may still be resting. Evocative of catacombs or a sarcophagus, the mode of display is truly violent, inducing a feeling of discomfort, glaciation, literally freezing the visitor's own body (there lies the other reason for the -9°C temperature). The teardrop cannot be gazed at too long, as its sight is difficult to bear. Chim Pom had previously created an installation on the theme of the impossible exhibition: *Don't Follow The Wind* (opened in 2015), assembling several artworks in the contaminated zone around the Fukushima power station, which is of course closed to the public. Opening a literally “unvisitable” exhibition emphasises the world's new boundaries, at the very limit of what is thinkable, tolerable, visible. At the intersection of participative art, sentimental and poetic art and conceptual art, Chim Pom's frozen teardrop carries the visitors to the very heart of the disaster. The land on which Reborn Art Festival is held is still charged with the tragedy that took place there, which is why it is so bold to invoke ghosts on this haunted land, as Hiraki Sawa also does in the films he screens in a cave by the water.
- 22 Ghosts have become a recurring theme in Japanese artistic production ever since the Fukushima nuclear disaster, reactivating an ancient traditional subject of Japanese iconography. Ghosts represent the presence of the deceased that surrounds us of course, but they also symbolise the menacing and invisible suspension that hovers over the country ever since the Fukushima accident. The figure of the ghost is the visible aspect of what is invisible, the proportion of death inside everything alive. It materialises this threshold, this distribution of the sensible, it is the creature of disaster, and particularly of our modern disasters. This is perceptible in the floating sculpture *Liminal Air* by Shinji Ohmaki, first shown in 2014 at Echigo-Tsumari, and subsequently installed in front of the windows of the Mori Museum, concealing the view they offer of the city. The series of works by Tsuyoshu Ozawa, entitled “Return of...” could also be mentioned. It represents the fictional travels abroad of great figures of Japanese history, like the painter Fujita or the philosopher Kakuzo Okakura (2017 Yokohama Triennial). Yukikori Yanagi also revives the ghosts of the past, in a more political. For the 2017 Yokohama Triennial, he showed his works in the basement of the Port Opening Memorial Hall. In the darkness, a Japanese

flag eaten away by ants is displayed: damaged, cracked, broken, all at once fragile and extremely lyrical, a swan-song. In the next room, a giant eye installed in the midst of debris becomes the screen on which nuclear explosions are projected. Atomic mushrooms are burnt into the visitor's retina, objects of fascination and astonishment. In every room, Yukinori Yanagi mixes the political and historical dimensions to a poetic and violent expressionism: in an apocalyptic scenography, everyone's responsibility is questioned. Debris and writing throughout the space create a suspended, incandescent environment, like the last work in the exhibition, a burning planet. But ghosts and spirits are not alone in coming back to life. Convalescents also feel with a new-found intensity the small things of life. Reborn Art Festival also tries to reactivate the damaged beauty of Tohoku coast. Generally speaking, these art festivals are places for everyone, children and art specialists alike, to experience how tenuous and precious life is, which explains all the artistic devices attempting to enhance perception. Many works function like windows, reframing the viewer's gaze, representing, like a painting, the surrounding natural beauty. Other more singular devices are used, like the bathtub that Takayuki Yagi transports everywhere with him. The tub and the action of bathing, which act as a sounding board, seem to revive the landscape. For the Japan Alps Art Festival, the Mé collective designed a white cave with rounded volumes, from which one can contemplate the landscape as from within a primal womb. After the tempest, life should be led purely. At the Sapporo International Art Festival, Akio Suzuki installed steles where visitors could stand to listen to nature. These positions, renewing their sensitivity, are at once vantage and listening points, and seem to outline acupuncture points for the landscape.

- 23 Perhaps the real experience of rebirth is becoming conscious of the world around us, but also becoming conscious of others. In this sense, the collective processes activated for the festivals are not so much about collaborating as they are about being mindful of others. This is the case, for example, of the piece by Icelandic artist Ragnar Kjartansson, which was shown at the 2017 Yokohama Triennial. From within different rooms, musicians try and play the music they hear in the headphones they wear. Because of the attention they pay each other, the music is in fact harmonious and even somewhat hypnotic: the work, which is more associative than it is collective, questions our ability to connect with one another through art and music.

The Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale, Christian Boltanski en collaboration avec Jean Kalman, *The Last Class*, 2006

© H. KURATANI

Are festivals a new form of art?

- 24 Yoshihide Otomo, the artistic director of the Sapporo festival, also uses this pre-established harmony system made possible by art. Each work is autonomous and was conceived by one artist alone. However, if we examine them a little more closely, the installations seem to answer each other. All of them use as their starting point the debris of a world that has come to an end, yet which continue to emit sound or movement. For example, in the installation by Yuko Mohri, old pianos start playing on their own: she transforms a long university corridor into a soundscape where the wind can blow, bringing echoes from the past back to the surface. Testuya Umeda gathers objects he discovered in the forgotten attic of a department store, and sets them in motion in relation to the building's vibrations. Kanta Horio occupies an abandoned house and installs it with a device that allows it to open its doors and turn the lights on on its own. It almost seems as though this haunted house has awakened after a long sleep, yawned and let out a shout, before being destroyed once and for all at the end of the Triennial. The movements of life, memory and objects are greater than those of humankind. Should we not stay attentive to this common basis of life that connects us all together? *Intention and Substance*, a beautiful installation by Satoshi Hata also encourages us to pay attention to the cycle of life. Satoshi Hata creates an encounter between liquid water and gaseous water in a very short circuit, defying our conceptual categories and exploding in myriad backlit sparks. All these works share an automatic quality from which humans are excluded.

- 25 Some elements recur from one installation to the the next, making Yoshihide Otomo's deliberate aim obvious. In general, artists (except perhaps musicians, like him) rarely work together. He decided to make them collaborate without their knowledge, transfiguring them from artists in a festival into musicians in a jazz band. This is one way of understanding the title of the Triennial: *How Do We Define "Art Festival"?* The interrogative form means the festival is hidden and awaits construction: the festival itself is the masterpiece, born of the connection between all the other works. Yoshihide Otomo is like a great conductor, and the festival is a concert, creating harmony between the different artistic proposals and connecting individuals. In one way, Yoshihide Otomo is very close to Fram Kitagawa's original conception of a large-scale festival where curating is an actual art form¹⁹. Festivals thus become polyphonic, total works of art. There is quite an enchanting side to Kitagawa and Otomo that reminds one of Jacques Demy, turning festivals into full-blown festivities: this has nothing to do with relational art such as Western theoreticians define it. Art is not used to serve heterogeneous ends, it is included in a totalising concept that sees art as part of the community and the people. In this way, festivals become new models of society, responses to disasters.

NOTES

2. I would like to thank Tadashi Kawamata, Anne-Sophie Lenoir, Rei Maeda, Aomi Okabe, Yoshihide Otomo, Tetsuya Ozaki, Reiko Setsuda, Yukiko Shikata, Samson Sylvain, Kanoko Tamura, Keiko Toyoda and Reiko Tsubaki for their comments and the time they gave me.
3. Bouvier, Nicolas. *Le Vide et le plein : carnets du Japon, 1964-1970*, Paris : Folio, 2004, p. 59
4. See <http://www.biennialfoundation.org/2017/09/connectivity-method-future-biennales-triennales/>. The 2017 Sapporo Triennial's title also interrogates the festival's specific form: *How Do We Define "Art Festival"?*.
5. Favell, Adrian. *Before And After Superflat: A Short History of Japanese Contemporary Art, 1990-2011*, Hong Kong : Blue Kingfisher Limited, 2011, p. 174
6. See Favell, Adrian. « Echigo-Tsumari and the Art of the Possible. The Fram Kitagawa Philosophy in Theory and Practice », in Kitagawa, Fram. *Art Place Japan, The Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale And The Vision To Reconnect Art And Nature*, Princeton Architectural Press, 2015.
7. Kitagawa, Fram. *Art Place Japan*, Op. cit., p. 222
8. See Patin, Cla. *La Fabrique de l'art au Japon : portrait sociologique d'un march de l'art*, Paris : CNRS, 2016 (Chapter 2, "Les Grands magasins vecteurs privilgis de la diffusion des uvres d'art")
9. The very avant-gardist Tokyo Biennale, however, must also be mentioned. The 10th Biennale, in 1970, was curated by Yusuke Nakahara and organised by the newspaper *Yomiuri*. It played an important role in the history of Japanese avant-gardes, but this embryonic and premature Biennale ended after 1970, for lack of financial funds and because it was not widely publicized.
10. Favell, Adrian. *Before And After Superflat*, Op. cit.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 183
12. Kitagawa, Fram. *Art Place Japan*, *Ibid.*, p. 240
13. This is how Takashi Murakami justifies his *Superflat* pop movement as being part of Japanese art history. Murakami explains that in the Japanese language there is a concept for entertainment and a concept for the idea of craft, but that there is strictly speaking no concept

for art. Therefore artistic productions always stand between the fields of entertainment and craftsmanship. For example, *ukiyo-e* prints were understood as advertising actors, courtesans and the most beautiful landscapes of Japan but not as autonomous works of art.

14. Bishop, Claire. "The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontinents", *Artforum*, no.44, février 2006, p. 178-183

15. Heartney, Eleanor. "Can Art Change Lives?", *Art in America*, 100, no.6, juin 2012, p. 67-69

16. Favell, Adrian. *Before And After Superflat*, *Ibid.*, p. 165-166

17. Concerning this 1990-2000s trend, see the analyses of the different theoreticians that contributed to Takashi Murakami's catalogues, *Superflat* and *Little Boy*.

18. On this point, see Worms, Frédéric. *Revivre : éprouver nos blessures et nos ressources*, Paris : Flammarion, 2012

19. Many Japanese artist progressively become artistic event organisers, which they see as the continuation or even the fulfilment of their artistic process.

1. Julie Crenn "Who Run the World? South African Female Artists' Relationship to History and Normativity", *Critique d'art*, no.47, Autumn/Winter 2016, p. 117-128

AUTHORS

CLÉLIA ZERNIK

Clélia Zernik was a student at the Ecole Normale Supérieure. She holds an *agrégation* and a PhD in Aesthetics. She teaches Philosophy of art at the Beaux-Arts de Paris since 2011. Her first field of research was the relationship between art and science, as it is formulated by perception psychologists and phenomenologists (*Perception-cinéma*, Paris : Vrin, 2012; *L'Œil et l'objectif*, Paris : Vrin, 2014). Her research now focuses on film (*Les Sept samouraïs d'Akira Kurosawa*, Louvain : Yellow Now, 2013 ; *L'Attrait du café*, Louvain : Yellow Now, 2017) and Japanese contemporary art, which was made possible by research residencies at Waseda and Tokyo University.