

Art in the Seto Inland Sea: Examining the Impact of the Setouchi Triennale on Local Communities



Their material landscape brings alive a cultural practice of aesthetics and spirituality. These landscapes were inspired by ideas; but the ideas can enter lived experiences only because landscapes exist. So humans spell out their imagination on the landscapes they shape, and the landscapes write their forms on human experiences and the imagination it fosters.

- Jeremiah Purdy, *After Nature* (2015)



Summary

This report outlines the main activities and preliminary findings from my six-month Japan Foundation Asia Center Research Fellowship in Japan from 15 July 2019 to 14 January 2020. I was based in Tokyo and made several extended trips to the Setouchi region to learn more about the relationship between contemporary art and the island communities. While my research was anchored by the Setouchi Triennale, I was especially interested in what happens on the islands when there was no festival going on. During the fellowship period, I was affiliated to the Tokyo University of the Arts where I was supported by the faculty and graduate community from the Global Art Program. I also had the opportunity to visit a number of major exhibitions and art spaces in Japan, notably the Aichi Triennale in Nagoya, the Echigo-Tsumari Art Field in Niigata, the Tobiu Art Camp in Hokkaido, the Okayama Art Summit, Art Base Momoshima in Hiroshima and Arts Maebashi in Gunma – these excursions helped me gain a deeper understanding of the contemporary art scene in Japan outside of the Tokyo city center.

Contents

Introduction	1
Japan as Discursive Context	5
Fieldwork Methodology	7
Theoretical References	14
Artworks as Case Studies	17
Audiences: From Art to Community	19
Cultural Tourism: Art and Impact	24
Curatorial Ethics	33
Ecological Sustainability	36
Conclusion and Future Directions	41

Introduction

Over the past two decades, there has been a proliferation of art festivals and biennales around the world. In Asia, where countries and cities have been rapidly modernising, these large-scale exhibitions have become a key signifier of cultural and economic progress. These festivals are usually anchored to a specific city or region and held on a multi-year basis. At the last count in 2015, there were already more than 25 art festivals in Japan and this number continues to grow. In the Setouchi region, the first Okayama Art Summit was held in 2016. During my fellowship period, preparations were underway for the first Hiroshima Triennale in 2020 although the latter was cancelled due to censorship concerns in the fallout from the Aichi Triennale. These exhibitions and festivals are important contemporary curatorial projects that are often touted as bringing economic and cultural benefits to their host cities. They also give artists an opportunity to reach new audiences and try out experimental ideas, particularly given the participatory turn and interest in social engagement of many recent art projects which often call for broad-based community participation.

Today, the Setouchi Triennale, also known as the Setouchi International Art Festival, is among the most influential long-running curatorial projects in Japan. Helmed by the artistic director Fram Kitagawa since its inception, the Triennale has manifested in four iterations: 2010, 2013, 2016 and 2019. In each edition, it has re-invented itself slightly while building on previous themes and ideas.

Visitor numbers to the Setouchi islands have increased exponentially over the past decade, thanks to the publicity efforts of the Setouchi Triennale team. In 1990, there were less than 10,000 visitors. In 2019, an estimated 1,178,484 visitors, from Japan and abroad, visited the triennale. Works were shown across 12 islands and two port cities, Takamatsu and Uno. Notably, the latest edition incorporated more live and interactive elements, such as performances, film screenings, and food art events.



Fig. 1 Setouchi Triennale Information Centre in Takamatsu Passenger Terminal Building.

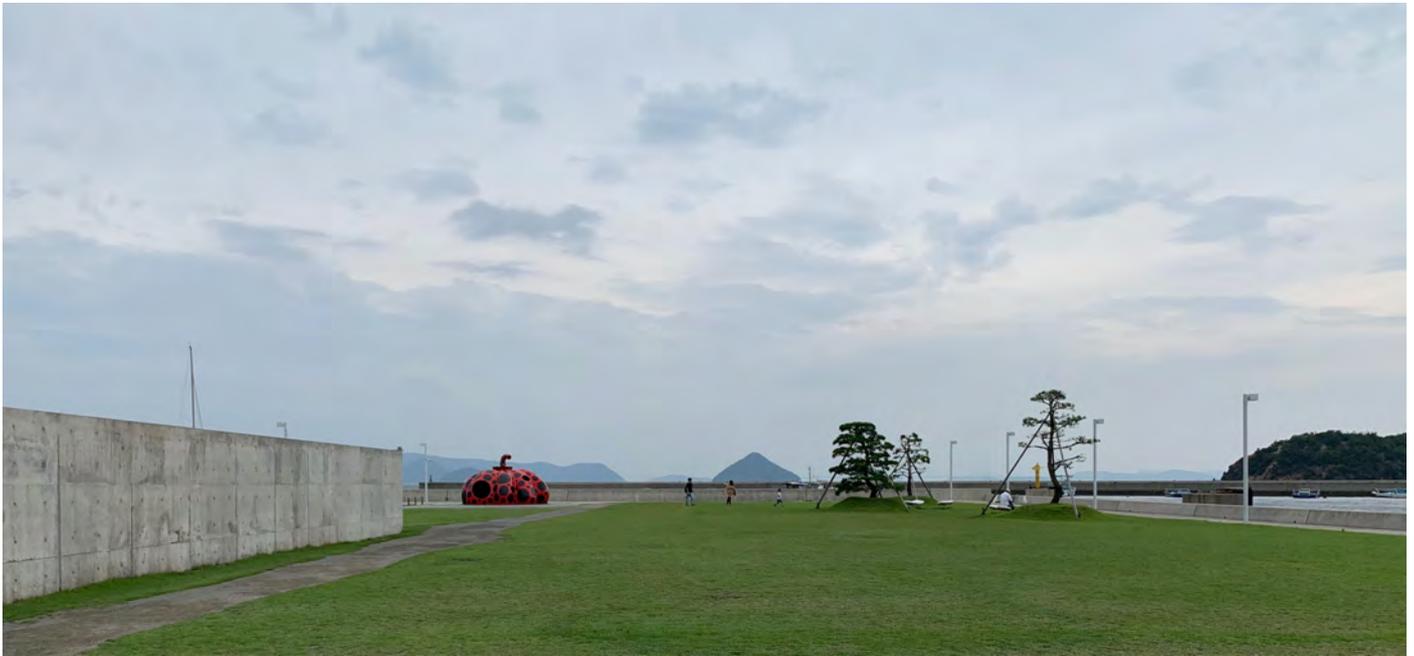


Fig. 2 Yayoi Kusama's *Red Pumpkin* (2006) in Miyanoura Port Square, Naoshima.

The Setouchi Triennale is unlike most large-scale art exhibitions around the world which have a new artistic director with each iteration. Given the long duration of Kitagawa's curatorial direction, the Setouchi Triennale offers the possibility of a ground-breaking model for re-thinking exhibition-making, particular in terms of community engagement and ecological sustainability over a longer timeframe, i.e. more than a decade instead of a few months. The Setouchi Triennale team appears to be committed to finding new ways to deal with global issues such as environmental sustainability and engaging disenfranchised or jeopardized communities through contemporary art. One indication is their revision of the umbrella structure after the 2019 Setouchi Triennale to include future "off-triennale" periods.

I first visited the Setouchi region in 2015 and made a couple more trips there before proposing this research project to the Japan Foundation in late 2018. Over the past five years, I have witnessed first-hand some of the trends and changes that have resulted from the introduction of contemporary art to the islands. The population demographics and economic constitution have been changing visibly, largely due to the influx of young people who have been drawn to participate in the triennale, work for local tourism-related businesses, or start new accommodation and food businesses. It remains to be seen, however, if these new settlers will stay on or if their presence is merely a temporary side effect of the festival. The increased use of technology by local lodging places has also allowed international visitors to make bookings via English-language websites, quickening the pace of life on the islands. In the past, most local lodgings would only take reservations in Japanese over the phone. Tatsuo Miyajima's 2018 updating of his *Sea of Time '98* work in Naoshima captures the change of pace, with new people playing an active role in the community. The work comprises LED lights counting down at different paces while floating on a pool of water in an old traditional house. The pace of the countdown was first set by 125 residents in Naoshima. In 2008, Miyajima worked with a new group of residents to reprogram the pace of the lights. While the artist, with support from the

Benesse Foundation, had tried to track down all the original participants, it was inevitable that some of the older ones had passed on, others had moved away or wanted to transfer their 'right' to another family member.



Fig 3 Tatsuo Miyajima, *Sea of Time '98* (1998), plastic coated waterproof light emitting diode, IC, electric wire, water, FRP water pool, 486 x 577 x 15 cm. Art House Project "Kadoya", a site-specific installation in a 200-year old house on Naoshima. Photo credit: Ken'ichi Suzuki. Courtesy Benesse Art Site Naoshima.

The overarching objective of this research project has been to learn more about the formation and development of a cultural ecosystem that is the context for the growing presence of contemporary art on the Setouchi islands from 2010 to 2020. The background for this research includes the recent socio-political history of contemporary Japan and the trends/dynamics of the international contemporary art world since the early 1990s.

Academic research on biennales and triennales to date have mostly focused on discussing curatorial thematics. Little has been done in terms of sustained impact studies that can shed light on how these large-scale exhibitions and specific artworks can have an effect on the cultural ecosystem over an extended duration. The literature that is available tends to be limited to descriptive documentation. Acknowledging that the measurement of "impact" is not straightforward and neither is the definition of what constitutes a "community", this project aims to break new ground by bringing together perspectives and methodologies from different disciplines to look at key Setouchi artworks in a dynamic context.

While there is an undeniable sociological aspect to this project, the contemporary artworks and projects remain the primary focus of this study. This project is situated in the nexus between the discipline of art history and contemporary curating as practice. As such, formal visual analysis and other art historical approaches to studying key artworks will be important. As a number of the durational art projects involve participatory work or social engagement, sociological and anthropological techniques such as formal and informal interviews, and participant observation were deployed. Moving forward, the research data collected about people, sites, and structures during the fellowship period will be analyzed in relation to the selected artworks that have been evaluated as suitable for further in-depth study.



Fig. 4 The Teshima Art Museum, designed by architect Ryue Nishizawa and artist Rei Naito, opened in 2010.

Japan as Discursive Context (2010-2020)

As it has been more than a decade since the first Setouchi Triennale in 2010, I believe that sufficient time has passed for an initial assessment of the festival's long-term impact on the island communities and a preliminary investigation into the sites/spaces where contemporary art has been installed. This will help (1) determine if contemporary art has taken root in the region or if its presence is merely transitory, and (2) understand the larger significance of this curatorial project in the context of early 21st century Japan.

During this period, Japan went through a series of important events that have profoundly affected the nation's psyche. These include the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami in 2011 and now the COVID-19 pandemic that led to the postponing of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. In Setouchi itself, the declining and aging population on these relatively inaccessible islands has underscored the urgency of finding solutions to population issues in Japan. In a longer historical arc going back to the early 20th century, the effects of discrimination against Hansen's Disease patients, following the repeal of the Leprosy Prevention Law in 1996, are also still being felt as activists work towards reparation and restitution for the victims and their families. Attempts at national reconciliation have shaped the development of a unique approach to curating contemporary art on the island of Oshima where a national leprosarium – now a national treatment facility and residence center for the few remaining patients – has been located for most of the 20th century.

The shift in population demographics on the islands has had a fundamental impact on the local ecosystem. Some islands, such as Naoshima, Shodoshima and Ibukijima, have managed to retain traditional core industries in metal refining, olive farming and fishing. New residents who have settled on the islands have brought along new types of businesses such as hipster coffee joints, organic cafes, local craft shops and boutique hotels. Most of these are connected to – and sustained by – the growth in cultural tourism. New islanders include a number of young people who have settled down on the art islands, particularly Naoshima, Teshima and Shodoshima, where the tourism infrastructure is relatively more developed. Some have gone on to start families over the past decade. There are also international Koebi-Tai volunteers who have chosen to stay on and live on the islands in after triennale has ended. Optimistic observers of the islands' development have pointed to the re-opening of an elementary school in Ogijima in 2014 – the first elementary to reopen following years of school closures across Japan due to declining birth rates. The elderly residents of Inujima also celebrated the arrival of a new baby to the only young family living on the island. Shingo Aoki is a Fukutake Foundation employee who met his wife when both were working on Teshima. Aoki now runs the Inujima Seirenscho Art Museum and also helps to take care of the other art projects on the island.



Fig. 5 Fukutake Foundation employee Shingo Aoki who manages the museum and artworks on Inujima.

While the new islanders have helped to revitalize life on the islands, the increase of human activity has also put pressure on the limited resources from traditional farming and fishing industries. These trends of urban-rural migration and diversification of the Setouchi island economies have to be seen in relation to the socio-economic situation elsewhere in Japan, particularly in areas that have hosted or are thinking of hosting major biennales or art festivals, notably Echigo-Tsumari, Aichi, Sapporo, Shiraoi and Okinawa.

Another important concern for contemporary art development is the rise of right-wing nationalism and its incursion into generally more liberal cultural spaces.

Political friction has exposed chasms between different parts of Japanese society and also brought attention to underlying socio-political issues such as social alienation and economic disenfranchisement, both of which are more pervasive than previously thought. During my time in Japan, this was highlighted by two disturbing incidents that have had ripple effects within the Japanese art scene: the arson attack on the famous Kyoto Animation studio in July 2019 and the censorship of the Aichi Triennale in August of the same year.



Fig. 6 Video still from news report “Dozens Die in Suspected Arson Attack at Animation Studio” (July 19, 2019)
Image source: ANN News, TV Asahi



Fig. 7 The “Freedom of Expression”? exhibition at the Aichi Prefecture Museum of Art in Nagoya was shut down after 2019 Aichi Triennale organizers received numerous protests and even death threats objecting to the display of Korean artists Kim Seo-kyung and Kim Eun-sung’s sculptural installation *Statue of a Girl of Peace* (2011).
Image source: artnet News, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/censorship-aichi-triennale-2019-1617214> (accessed 20 October 2020)

Fieldwork Methodology



Fig. 8 James Jack's long running socially-engaged art project *Sunset House: Language as the House of Being* (2010) in Kounoura, Shodoshima. Artist examining the condition of the art objects inside the house while Atsushi Oshita, his friend from the Shodoshima town council, surveys the garden outside.

The Setouchi Triennale takes place in the region of the Seto Inland Sea every three years and has three exhibition seasons – Spring, Summer, Fall – with a break in-between. The line-up of artworks changes slightly for each season. While the artworks are often site-specific, the sites may not be specific or permanent to an artwork. For example, some of the old vacant houses on the islands that were originally acquired by the Fukutake Foundation for artworks were subsequently re-deployed to host other artists' works in a subsequent triennale edition. The islands and port cities have also shown different artworks during different seasons of the same triennale. These variations in exhibition programming can be seen as curatorial strategies to encourage visitors to return to the Setouchi region more than once, in different seasons. Over the years, some artworks have become permanent entries, most obviously those that operate even in non-triennale years, such as the Benesse art museums and art-sites on Naoshima, Teshima and Inujima. Previous triennale artworks may also remain in place even without being included in future editions. James Jack's *Sunset House* (2010-present) in Kounoura, Shodoshima, for example, continues to exist in the community even though it was not a participating artwork in the most recent 2019 Setouchi Triennale.

During my fellowship period, I arranged my trips to Setouchi so that I would be there during the shoulder seasons, i.e. at the start or end of the summer and fall triennale seasons – I wanted to speak to the islanders when they were less distracted by tourists and also look at the sites with less people around. Often enough, I found that the artworks remained in situ with open access even and with no staff in attendance or visitor in sight. I visited the artworks on all twelve triennale islands: Naoshima, Teshima, Shodoshima, Inujima, Oshima, Ogijima, Megijima, Awashima, Ibukijima, Takamijima, Shamijima and Takamijima. I also spent time in Takamatsu and Uno. Elsewhere in the Chugoku region, I visited the Okayama Art Summit and Art Base Momoshima.

I was unable to make it for the triennale's spring season in May 2019 due to my work responsibilities in Singapore, so I enlisted an image-based researcher to carry out basic photo documentation and report on his impressions of the artworks. This was Taiwan-based American architect/filmmaker Steve Chen, who also assisted me on my second trip to the Setouchi islands. Chen was able to help collect photo documentation of the artworks and art sites on Shamijima, which was only participating during the spring season. Having collaborated on other projects in the past, we were able to have a productive discussion about the changing landscape in Setouchi and continue developing ideas from previous conversations. Chen also brought a different level of understanding for the architectural aspects, notably for Sambuichi's work for the Inujima Seirenscho Art Museum and the Naoshima Town Hall, as well as for Kazuyo Sejima's Inujima Art House Project, particularly the Inujima Life Garden.

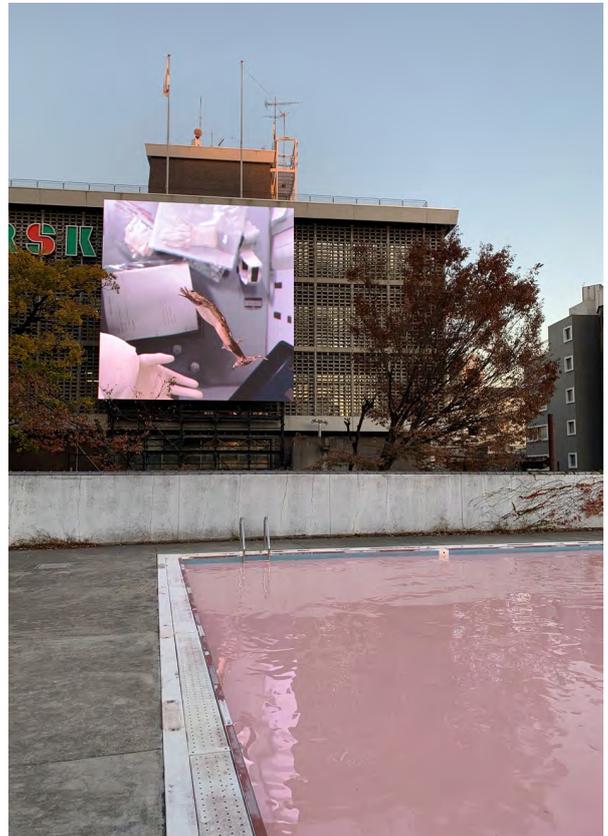


Fig. 9 Pamela Rosenkranz's site-specific installation *Skin Pool (Oromom)* (2019) with John Gerrard's video projection *X. laevis (Spacelab)* (2017) at the Okayama Art Summit, 2019.



Fig. 10 Inujima Seirenscho Art Museum on the site of a former copper refinery.

My experience and impressions of Shamijima were different when I finally made it there in January 2020. Unlike the steady streams of visitors in spring, it was almost completely deserted when I was there in winter. Shamijima is an island that is no longer an island. It used to be separated from mainland by a small channel, which was filled up about fifty years ago in a major land reclamation project. Although it is described as an island in the triennale publicity materials, Shamijima is now a peninsula. In Shamijima, Israeli sculptor Tanya Preminger's artwork *Stratums* (2013) has become a permanent part of the local landscape since it was first commissioned in 2013. *Stratums* is comprised of a single large mound of earth in the middle of a small park next to the museum. The work is large, site-specific and earth-anchored; it is impossible to move without destroying it. From the spiral path that goes up to the top, one is able to survey the Shamijima landscape for quite a distance. Although the form of the artwork is minimal and modern, it seems perfectly at home in the manicured context of the little park that is surrounded by natural scenery. Does *Stratums* cease to 'exist', when there is no exhibition going on? In the quiet chill of winter, the work seemed just as mysterious as the hidden *kofun* tombs; the large mound was silent, stolid and inscrutable. The myriad ways to experience this work at different times highlights the seemingly arbitrary parameters that define an artwork's existence to its exhibition context, 'existing' only from the triennale's opening to its closing, and requiring witnesses whether in the form of visitors or volunteers who guard its access. As in other biennales all over the world, artworks are usually left in solitude after the opening weeks.



Fig. 11 Tanya Preminger, *Stratums* (2013), site-specific installation, earth and grass, 6.5 x 28 x 18m in Shamijima. Photo credit: Steve Chen.

Getting to know the rhythms and the nature of time on the Setouchi islands was an important aspect of my field research. To do this, I stayed over on Naoshima, Teshima and Shodoshima. This enabled me to walk around the islands without the tourists around and get a sense of the local pace of life. In addition to collecting photo and video documentation of the artworks and sites, I carried out a number of interviews with the local people, artists, cultural workers, volunteers and small business owners of cafes, bed-and-breakfasts and small craft/snack shops. Not all the interviews were formal; some casual conversations were highly informative, particularly on the smaller islands.

On Ibukijima, I was accompanied by former NHK producer Kajita Taketo, who acted as my interpreter. Kajita was immensely helpful in opening up conversations with the islanders. We struck up an acquaintanceship with a local designer-artist Miyoshi Yoiichi, who designed and fabricated a number of large-scale installations, which he had installed at scenic spots on the island. Although his works had not been selected for official participation in the triennale, he nevertheless put in a lot of effort to produce them anyway. As a “self-participating” artist, he was more than happy to guide visitors on a tour around the island to see his works – he even displayed the maquettes outside his house. Yoiichi was not born on Ibukijima but had studied there when he was young. Today, he maintains a weekend/summer home on the island in addition to a home in Okayama where he works. Yoiichi knows the other islanders very well, as well as the history



Fig. 12 Shoko Sasakawa, the Koebi-Tai Coordinator for Oshima, manning the entry desk to artworks during the triennale.



Fig. 13 Artist-designer Miyoshi Yoiichi explaining how certain words in the Ibukijima dialect originated from the Heian period.

and geography of the Ibukijima; he was able to explain how, although everyone understood and spoke standard Japanese, certain phrases in the local Ibukijima dialect retained meanings that dated back to the Heian period.

The problem of language and cultural interpretation proved to be a critical issue as it was essential to understanding the contexts for art production and audience reception on the islands. I gave careful consideration to finding suitable research assistants with good interpretation skills. This was tricky as I needed people who were effectively bilingual, in either English-Japanese or Chinese-Japanese, had some familiarity with contemporary art terminology, and had to be very comfortable with meeting and building up rapport with new people in unexpected situations. There were some islands where the locals still spoke with a strong dialect that was not readily understood by Japanese people from elsewhere. While most of the people who worked for the Benesse art museums or art-sites could speak English, not all were comfortable carrying out extended conversations. Many of the older locals who were born on the islands spoke only Japanese and it took some time to break the ice with them. Some people were kind enough to write to me after they had time to think over my questions. Aikiko Yabuuchi, one of the Setouchi Karen bicycle shop attendants on Teshima was one such example.



Fig. 14 Aikiko Yabuuchi, originally from Osaka, works at the Setouchi Karen bicycle rental shop on Teshima.

For this research project, it was important to take into account its inherent sociological and anthropological aspects when formulating suitable methodologies. In terms of experiencing and evaluating the artworks, it was necessary to keep abreast of trends in socially-engaged art practices and participatory work. Understanding local adaptations to international art trends and Japanese preferences in form and subject were also important. The latter have been particularly intriguing to other foreign researchers working on Japanese contemporary art.

Overall, I was fortunate to work with different research companions during this period and am particularly grateful to my colleagues at the Tokyo University of the Arts for volunteering their help. Besides the language support, my research companions offered unique perspectives and insights that helped me think through new issues on the ground. While some of the fascinating anecdotes and information gleaned from interactions with the locals may not be necessarily incorporated into the final research findings or followed up for further study, they have been invaluable in helping me understand the subtleties of the Setouchi context that frames the art on the islands.

In Japan, there is a tendency for artworks to take on anthropomorphic traits in the eyes of an empathetic, even affectionate, viewer. An example would be Yayoi Kusama's *Yellow Pumpkin* (2014) which is one of the most recognizable artworks in the world today. The famous yellow pumpkin with black polka dots has become a symbol of the Setouchi art islands. In glossy travel magazine images, the lone pumpkin, usually appears to be pensively gazing at the horizon of the Seto Inland Sea from its permanent perch at the end of short pier in Naoshima. In reality, the popular artwork is almost never alone, regardless of the time of day or weather condition. There is almost always a constant stream of visitors waiting patiently in line to take an Instagram-worthy selfie with Kusama's pumpkin. Recognizing the dissonance between public images and reality, I was interested to find new ways to think about this artwork by asking, for instance, what lies outside of the photographic frame? Thus, rather than taking perfect images of the *Yellow Pumpkin*, we collected media images of local museum workers carrying the large sculpture away for safekeeping in advance of Typhoon Krosa. Another starter question that guided the formulation of my research approach was: Have the local people ever taken a photo of or with the *Yellow Pumpkin*? I believe the answer is probably no. This sort of hypothetical approach helped me structure the research framework for thinking about the impact of the artworks and their relationship to the islands people.



Fig. 15 Yayoi Kusama, *Yellow Pumpkin* (1994), site-specific installation, fibreglass, 200 x 250 cm, Naoshima.



Fig. 16 Handlers moving Kusama's *Yellow Pumpkin* before Typhoon Krosa hits.

Image credit:
Instagram user @k24da's post, August 14, 2019

Theoretical References



Fig. 17 View of Seto Inland Sea from Benesse House, Naoshima.

The future development of this research project is situated within a broader global discourse about ethics and sustainability in the age of the Anthropocene. In that regard, I would like to mention a couple of references for my study: Jedediah Purdy's *After Nature* (2015) and Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011). Nixon has defined *slow violence* as "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (Nixon:2). Nixon has argued for the urgency of keeping our attention on the crises of slow violence at a time when it is easy to be seduced and distracted by the visual spectaculars playing out in the media space (COVID-19 patients dying without ventilators for example.) In relation to this research, the study of the Setouchi Triennale's impact on Oshima, for example, has brought the tragic history of

discrimination against Hansen's Disease patients in Japan into the narrative of contemporary art and exhibition history in Japan. By extension, the broad parameters of this issue also encompass other histories of discrimination in Japan, for instance, the neglected and prejudiced existence of the *burakumin* outcasts.

The politics that shape the Setouchi region are not limited to the local or the arts; they are entangled in a larger global discourse about ethical sustainability and ecological activism. In Purdy's book, he discusses the yet unknown future of politics in the Anthropocene. As Purdy observed, "politics, economics, and ecology are all in near-perpetual crisis" in the world we live in today. As noted by other scholars researching on islands and climate change, things are intensified and concentrated on islands, whether in terms of local or global impact. In that regard, what is happening in the Setouchi region may also have relevance for similar situations in other parts of Japan.

One of the important narratives that have surfaced in this project is about how human efforts – in this case, curatorial strategies towards revitalization of the region via cultural tourism – have shaped the history and human geography of the region, though it remains to be seen whether to fertile or futile ends. In Purdy's characterization of the Anthropocene, he wrote:

The Anthropocene finds its most radical expression in our acknowledgment that the familiar divide between people and the natural world is no longer useful or accurate. Because we shape everything, from the upper atmosphere to the deep seas, there is no more nature that stands apart from human beings. There is no place or living thing that we haven't changed... It makes no sense now to honor and preserve a nature that is defined by being not human, that is purest in wilderness, rain, forests and the ocean. Instead, in a world we can't help shaping, the question is what we will shape. (Purdy: 2-3)

How can curatorial frameworks incorporate strategies towards ethical cohabitation between humans and nature – or is that an impossibility? In Japan, national leprosaria in Japan are nearly always found in breathtakingly beautiful nature spots – has the isolation of these places helped preserve the natural beauty? How do we reconcile the civilizing developments that come with cultural tourism? At the same time, there are also historical burdens that further complicate these negotiations. Tensions in the cultural realm have also revealed Japan to be a less homogenous country than is commonly conveyed. In Hokkaido and Okinawa, for example, traditional/indigenous culture, feudal prejudices and national identity all come into play in discussions on contemporary art's place in society. While such political tensions may be less charged than sociological ones in Setouchi, it is also worth noting that they nevertheless still exist, for example, in the competition for resources between the islands.



Fig. 18 A bird's eye view of the former Hansen's Disease patients' residences on Oshima. Photo credit: Steve Chen

At the Setouchi Triennale Asia Forum 2019, I found it useful to hear the views of the people who have been involved in conceptualizing and supporting the Setouchi Triennale's continued existence, particularly art patron and Setouchi general producer Soichi Fukutake and artistic director Fram Kitagawa. The lecture given by Japanese writer-philosopher Natsuki Ikezawa was especially provocative, as he touched on the feasibility of art festivals in Hokkaido and Okinawa and histories of political-cultural conflict within Japan.

Finally, while this report does not include comparative studies, I would like to highlight two other contemporary art festivals that may be suitable as comparative models, namely the Kochi Biennale in India and the Dhaka Art Summit in Bangladesh. The Skulptur Projekte Münster in Germany and the Dia Foundation's projects in the US have also provided historical inspiration for the curatorial direction. As curatorial models, these projects are all closely anchored in their specific local geography and often seen as ahead of international art trends, from the artworks and curatorial practices that have been introduced to the level of social engagement with their communities.

Artworks as Case Studies

One of the primary tasks of this research project was to identify key artworks that would be suitable for further art historical study. Hundreds of artworks have been shown through the Setouchi Triennale platform over the past decade. In 2020, there were 75 artists from 18 countries showing across seven islands. In 2019, more than 200 works were shown across 12 islands and two port towns.

Qualitative judgment was applied in order to evaluate the innovation in an artist's practice and the historical significance of an artwork. Site visits, media reports, archival research, conversations with artists, volunteers and local islanders played a part in making the choices. It was not necessary for the selected artworks to be by a well-known artist and the key considerations in the final selection included identifying the presence of:

- time-based elements
- an evolving relationship between the artwork and its community
- interventions/interruptions in the original Setouchi landscape since 2010

I was especially interested in works that have been:

- installed since 2010
- included in more than one triennale
- produced by artists who had been engaging with this region for an extended period
- produced by artists whose practice overlap with the interests and objectives of this research project

Critical analyses of the artworks and their contexts would shed light on whether the functional success of Kitagawa's curatorial framework fulfil the goals of renewal and self-sustainability, beyond the initial signs of revitalization. I aim to put together a cohesive picture of how the cultural ecosystem has developed across the islands in the Setonaikai region over the past decade by identifying intertwined narratives that thread through these artworks.

The shortlisted artworks, organized by island, are:

TESHIMA

Teshima Art Museum by Rei Naito and Ryue Nishizawa, opened in 2010

Storm House (2010) by Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller

Les Archives Du Coeur (2010) and *La Forêt Des Murmure* (2016) by Christian Boltanski

Tom Na H-iu (2010) by Mori Mariko

NAOSHIMA

Sea of Time '98 (1998/2018) in Art House Project “Kadoya” by Tatsuo Miyajima and the Naoshima residents

SHODOSHIMA

Sunset House: Language of Being (2010) by James Jack

AWASHIMA

Night & Day (Life Goes On); A Bouquet for the Lady of the House; PhoUdon & COFFEE HOUSE (2019) by Dinh Q. Le

SHAMIJIMA

Stratums (2013) by Tanya Preminger

OSHIMA

Life of N: 70 years on Oshima – A room with a wooden pot (2019) by Seizo Tashima

Strait Songs (2019) by Fuyuki Yamakawa

Storytelling Table Runner (2019) by Tomoko Konoike

A Place of Connection (2010), part of the *Art for the Hospital Project* (2010) (also referred to as *Yasashii Bijutsu*, or the “Gentle Art Project”) organized by Nobuyuki Takahashi¹

INUJIMA

Inujima Seirenscho Art Museum by Yukinori Yanagi and Hiroshi Sambuichi, opened in 2008

Inujima “Art House Project” Former Site of a Stone Cutter’s House / Listen to the Voices of Yesterday Like the Voices of

Ancient Times (2013) by Yusuke Asai

MOMOSHIMA²

Travelers Through A Hundred Years (2019), Art Base Momoshima 2019 Special Exhibition + Discussions and permanent installations by Yukinori Yanagi

Holding Perspective (1986) by Nobuyuki Oura

Today My Empire Sings (2017) by Meiro Koizumi

¹ It includes Oshima resident Hiroshi Nomura’s bonsais and a cement autopsy table as found object.

² Momoshima is not part of the Setouchi Triennale. It is off Hiroshima’s Onomichi town. It offers a comparison to other islands, especially with Inujima where Yanagi’s earlier project the Inujima Seirenscho Art Museum is sited. Art Space Momoshima is an art space initiated and conceptualized by Yukinori Yanagi in 2012.

Audiences: From Art to Community

The Setouchi Triennale has played an important role in attracting visitors to the islands, with more than a million visitors to the 2019 edition. From 2016 to 2019, the number of visitors increased by about 30%. In 2018, a non-triennale year, there were more than half a million visitors. Exhibition audiences are often referred to in monolithic terms, as if they are a homogenous entity. In this project, I would like to take the opportunity to unpack the idea of the audience(s), by discussing the many different kinds of people on the Setouchi islands and their very different relationships with the various artworks.

At the same time, however, the population size on the islands has been dropping rapidly over the past few decades and this decrease has accelerated in the past 10 years. In the 1950s, there were around 8,000 people living on the Setouchi islands. Today, there are about 3,000. On Oshima, the population is now less than half of what it was. During the first triennale in 2001, there were a little more than 100 people. This number has since dropped to around 52 residents passed away during the 2019 triennale period. In the same year, there were only around 30 people on the island of Inujima.

In the early 1990s, at the beginning of Fukutake's venture into bringing art to the Setouchi islands, not only was there no art, there was no



Fig. 19 Keisuke Sakai owner of the Lemon Hotel in Tonosho, Teshima, welcoming visitors during the Triennale.



Fig. 20 Local islanders sharing stories of bygone days during a triennale weekend on Awashima.

audience. Arts researcher Mio Yachita, at that time a young student visiting Naoshima for the first time in 2006, recounted from her blog entry:

As I was waiting for the ferry to fetch us back to Okayama from Naoshima, I saw local laborers watching baseball, drinking beer, saying “Giants gonna lose tonight, huh?” When ferry arrived, there was a group of fancy-looking foreigners getting off, fancy-looking Benesse House staff in suits waiting, greeting them in fluent English, taking them to the hotel up on the hill that felt more like a castle on a mountain, separating life from the lay people. I felt slightly angry. What is the art for?

The opening of the Benesse House Museum on Naoshima in 1992 was not immediately welcomed by the local people. The building of the museums on Inujima in 2008 and Teshima in 2010 also faced resistance from the local residents who had a bad experience with the earlier exploitation. Town-hall meetings had to be conducted with them to ease their misgivings before the projects went ahead.



Fig. 21 Regulars gathering at the end of the day for drinks and conversation at their local izakaya in Miyanoura, Naoshima.

Although the triennale has played an important role in (re)building a new community network that includes local residents, museum/cultural workers, Koebi-Tai volunteers, local business owners/employees and new settlers, there remains a sense of separation between the different segments of the island populations and between the art and the residents. For example, although there is free entry to the museums and art sites for the locals, those who are museum workers or working in the support industries do not really get to enjoy the art as the island economies are mostly synchronised with opening hours, i.e. closed on Mondays or Tuesdays. Island time thus may not be quite the same in terms of experience for different people.

Among the islands, contemporary art and cultural tourism on Naoshima is probably the most developed, from art museums to art-sites and guerrilla art. On the island, there are three types of bus services: one for the locals, one for everyone but with priority given to the locals, and one for Benesse House guests only. At the local izakaya, I asked some of the older islanders if they have been to the museums and they all replied no. One woman said, laughing, that she would not enjoy it at all as she would have to keep quiet or whisper in the museum! The original islanders' attitudes towards non-islanders can be ambivalent and complex as well. While they are generally supportive of the economic boost from the art activities, they tend to be less enthusiastic about “outside” people settling down permanently.



Fig. 22 Quiet time in the morning for the young Kawasaki family who own and manage Francoile, a boutique hotel and café they designed and built in Honmura, Naoshima.



Fig. 23 The Naoshima town bus with cheery Kusama-inspired polka-dots and pumpkins on the narrow roads, threading through the old Japanese houses.



Fig. 24 The mothers of Ibukijima who set up “Urara Kitchen” pose for a photo with Keizō Hamada, the governor of Kagawa prefecture. Urara Kitchen mothers prepare bento sets to showcase Ibukijima’s famous *iriko* (small sardines) for Triennale visitors.

Benesse Foundation’s primary recruitment takes place in Tokyo and many of the museum employees are not from the region. Among the Koebi-Tai volunteers, the highest number of international volunteers comes from Hong Kong, followed by Taiwan and China. Based on my conversations with people working on Naoshima, Teshima and Shodoshima, the original islanders are especially resistant to selling land and property to outsiders who are not from the islands. In that sense, I imagine that it is not so easy to encourage people to settle down on the islands and imagine a long-term future.

I have identified four broad sub-populations, towards further analyzing their relationship to the artworks (although I believe these categories span a wide spectrum across individuals):

1. the local people who were born on the islands
2. the tourists, both domestic and international
3. the cultural workers working for the museums/triennale
4. support industries for cultural tourism, including farmers, fishermen and workers in hospitality or transport businesses

The communities on each island have a different composition of these sub-populations. The people’s attitudes and relationships to having contemporary art on the islands can range from appreciation to indifference or even antagonism. Some see the artworks in utilitarian terms, functional to culture or a certain lifestyle. There may be other ways of sub-classifying the island communities as well, for instance, by self-identification or sense of belonging. These sub-classifications can be temporary or permanent.

For my research project, the identification of at-risk island communities has been of special interest. By “at risk”, I refer to how traditional ways of living, in a previously stable ecosystem, are now under threat of irreversible change. In the Setouchi islands, there are at least three types of at-risk communities. They are people living on:

1. formerly lively islands like Awashima that now have tiny homogenous populations after the cessation of a primary business (the Maritime Academy in this case)
2. islands like Teshima that are still recovering from the after-effects of toxic industrial waste dumping in the 1970s
3. a special island like Oshima that used to be a sanatorium for leprosy patients up until the 1990s

Although the islands are collectively referred to as the Setouchi Islands or Setonaikai, Shikoku, etc., each island community has its own unique history and geographical set of relationships in the region. Under the rubric of the Setouchi Triennale, there have been contemporary art initiatives that attempt to engage and negotiate with each community’s unique set of problems and issues, with mixed reception and results. Given the relatively small size of the islands and populations, it also seems unlikely that such efforts are indefinitely sustainable or can be scaled up for greater impact. In that regard, finding common identifiers may be necessary towards some broad-based solutions that are applicable across the board. Future impact studies of broad-based solutions could also be useful for comparative thinking and policy-making in other parts of Japan or even elsewhere in the world, particularly with regard to sustainable island ecologies.



Fig. 25 Seasonal *mikans* left on a bench by a bus stop in Teshima. Pay-as-you wish with open cash box.

Cultural Tourism: Art and Impact



Fig. 26 Shinro Ohtake, *Naoshima Bath I love Yu* (2009), site-specific installation in a public bathhouse, Miyanoura, Naoshima. Photo credit: Steve Chen.

The “Bilbao Effect” is often used to describe how the development of art projects such as museums, large-scales exhibitions, and festivals have transformed and rejuvenated the economies of fatigued cities. In Japan, the Yokohama Triennale has often been cited as a case study of how art exhibitions can stimulate a local economy. The impact of cultural tourism is usually expounded on in positive economic terms. Going beyond an increase of tourist dollars, there is the creation of jobs in various industries, from hospitality to manufacturing and transport. We can see signs of cultural tourism in effect when people visit primarily to engage with or experience what they perceive as *local culture*. This may take the form of food, historic sites and buildings, religious rituals, traditional performances and other sensory, often visual, interactions with the local landscape and peoples.

The success of cultural tourism efforts in the Setonaikai region can be partly attributed to the rise of international tourism in Japan. The number of overseas visitors has been steadily increasing over the past

decade. In 2019. There were an estimated 31.88 million visitors, with more than half arriving from China, Taiwan and Hong Kong – the same countries that make up the highest proportion of Koebi-Tai volunteers. The curatorial framework for the Setouchi Triennale has focused on introducing and developing patronage of contemporary art towards the development of new cultural tourism economies. At the Setouchi Asia Forum, Kitagawa even drew parallels between visiting contemporary art on remote islands to religious sites and rituals that had drawn pilgrims to travel through Japan in past centuries.



Fig. 27 View of the Seto Inland Sea from the Kokuminshukusha Shodoshima, the national hotel popular with domestic tourists and business travelers.

As the first designated national park in Japan, the Setonaikai region is well-known for its natural scenery. It is also famous for the 88-temple Shikoku pilgrimage route that takes pilgrims on a scenic walking tour to temples and shrines in its mysterious valleys and beautiful coastal parks. While people from other parts of Japan are usually happy to visit Takamatsu and partake of some excellent udon while on a business trip, the typical domestic tourist is less inclined to make a special trip to the islands for contemporary art alone.



Fig. 28 View from the cable car going up to Shodoshima's Kankakei Gorge. The gorge in the Setonaikai National Park is designated as a National Place of Scenic Beauty and is ranked among the top three most beautiful ravines in Japan.

Given that contemporary art is not yet a natural draw for Japanese people outside of the art world, the current target audience for the Setouchi Triennale (and the Benesse art museums) is international visitors. Hopefully, there will eventually be a general audience (Generation X to Generation Alpha) in domestic Japan and the rest of Asia. By then, the artworks that are currently in place may be historicized as being from a different time and cultural moment. Already, however, we can see the impact of art in Setonaikai in the following areas:

- transformation of the natural landscape through landscaping and art projects
- architectural projects
- environmental interventions
- transport/shipping routes
- introduction of new industries



Fig. 29 Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Time Exposed* (1980-1997), a photo-based installation in the Benesse House Museum designed by Tadao Ando, opened in 1990, and on the cliff of a nearby rock formation.

The most significant physical impact on the contemporary visual landscape is through major architectural additions/commissions. These include not only the major museums and large-scale art installations, but also public projects like the Naoshima town hall designed by Hiroshi Sambuichi and selected smaller design projects by commercial or private owners. The latter are still relatively rare as land is not easy to purchase on the islands, as mentioned earlier. Nevertheless, these subtle renovations have helped to reshape the contours in the built environment and also transformed the island experience where/when they are open to public access because of tourism activities. Experientially, the major Benesse art museums on Naoshima, Teshima and Inujima have already fundamentally transformed the visitor's experience by mediating the islands through Japanese modern architectural aesthetics. The interiors of many old houses have also been transformed by artists' works, creating unexpected and unique experiences for visitors.



Fig. 30 Evening in Naoshima Hall. The town hall designed by Hiroshi Sambuichi, opened in 2016.

The relationship between art and the Setouchi islands is multi-layered. When we consider contemporary art's relationship with the communities on the Setouchi islands, it includes more than the triennale artworks. The Setouchi Triennale itself is a temporary festival and art that came to the islands via the triennale platform may not be permanent or long term. In mapping art on the islands, a number of large-scale artworks that have remained in-situ when the triennale is over, for example Shinro Ohtake's *Needle Factory* (2016), are

particularly important as they co-exist permanently with the people. For some of the artworks, it is not entirely clear who takes responsibility for them when the festival is not going on, as many participating artists do not live in the region. For some international artists, it could also be a one-time participation. These artworks have complex and varying relationships to the communities they are sited in. Some, for example, James Jack's *Sunset House* and Yusuke Asai's *Inujima "Art House Project" Former Site of a Stone Cutter's House / Listen to the Voices of Yesterday Like the Voices of Ancient Times* (2013) have been adopted by their neighbours and are looked after when the artists are not around and the triennale is not taking place. At the same time, there are also anecdotal accounts of towns where the local people have rejected an artist's proposal and the artwork had to be relocated. Such explicit resistance to contemporary art is very interesting. On the other hand, there are also commissions by the Fukutake Foundation or the Benesse Foundation, mostly on Naoshima, Teshima and Inujima, which have generated local employment and business opportunities.



Fig. 31 A neighbor looking after Yusuke Asai's outdoor installation on Inujima.

The aim of the Setouchi Triennale is to revitalize the Setonaikai region through contemporary art. But what does it mean to revitalize and what is being revitalized? Which is the priority, the people or nature? Is ethical cohabitation possible? And what happens when a choice needs to be made that is beneficial to one and detrimental to the other? On the islands, the balance between people and nature continues to change. On Awashima, for example, the wild boar population has been increasing. These wild boars attack cultivated vegetable gardens and can also be dangerous to people at night. Some people have moved away from their mountain homes to the coastal areas, as it has become unsafe to live in sparsely populated areas. On Teshima, overnight bicycle rental is no longer allowed due to the risks of encountering wild boars. This made it challenging to view works in the evening, for example Mori Mariko's *Tom Na H-iu* (2010), which is situated in the middle of a forest clearing.



Fig. 32 Mariko Mori, *Tom Na H-iu* (2010), site-specific installation in a forest in a clearing in Tonosho, Teshima. Only viewable on weekend evenings during the triennale season. Photo credit: Masami Adachi.

The creation of a strong volunteer network, the Koebi-Tai, has been key to the success of the Setouchi Triennial as a cultural tourism venture. From the Chugoku and Shikoku regions (Kagawa, Okayama and Hiroshima), local volunteers appear to be driven by a sense of community and volunteerism rather than a keen interest in contemporary art. Local volunteers from the mainland prefectures were not always familiar with the islands' histories. According to the islanders, the Setouchi Islands are "floating", i.e. they do not have strong historical or geographical ties to a specific prefecture. Affiliations and alliances have changed through the centuries, depending on political and economic circumstances at different points in history.

Generally, there seems to be very little intra-island movement. Shodoshima is perhaps an exception to the other islands due to its more plentiful towns, shops and markets, and more frequent transportation access. Island residents who made the effort to see artworks on the other islands were often new transplants from Tokyo or other Japanese cities, or already involved in the arts and cultural tourism industries in some way. In that sense, these new settlers appeared to be replicating or transplanting previous lifestyles under island conditions, leading to some interesting interactions with existing islanders. Those who ran businesses such as cafes or bed-and-breakfasts tended to make more effort to build connections in the local ecosystem.

The infrastructure for tourism is, however, still relatively undeveloped on the islands, which have generally struggled to keep up with demand during the triennale season, especially the ferry and car rental services. Even so, some establishments have tried to resist ramping up business operations to cater to tourist demand since the triennale only takes place once every three years and only for six months. Among the islands, Shodoshima is probably the most tourist-ready, with its own government hotel and several car rental companies. Some islands are more committed to building up their cultural tourism industries. For last year's triennale, there were more accommodation possibilities on Naoshima and Teshima, with several small ryokans, hostels, and bed-and-breakfasts opening up online bookings in languages besides Japanese and listing themselves on Airbnb.



Fig. 33 A couple from Shodoshima making a day trip to Teshima for the very first time, stopping to ask for directions from a local passerby.

The Setouchi Triennale has made conspicuous effort to promote the food from the islands. Several eateries offer special menus or bento sets as their way of participating. While food options on the islands are still very limited in terms of quantity and venues, the quality of local produce is very high and the hospitality charmingly personable. Still, this has had to be factored into travel itineraries, which can prove to be quite a challenge. More prepared visitors take care to plan their meals around the limited transport times on the islands and between the ports and the islands.

Given that the infrastructure for cultural tourism is still developing, the COVID-19 pandemic will be a critical test to see whether this infrastructure has taken root and whether the nascent community for contemporary art will endure.



Fig. 34 New pop-up kiosks on Naoshima opened by young people newly moved to the island.

Curatorial Ethics

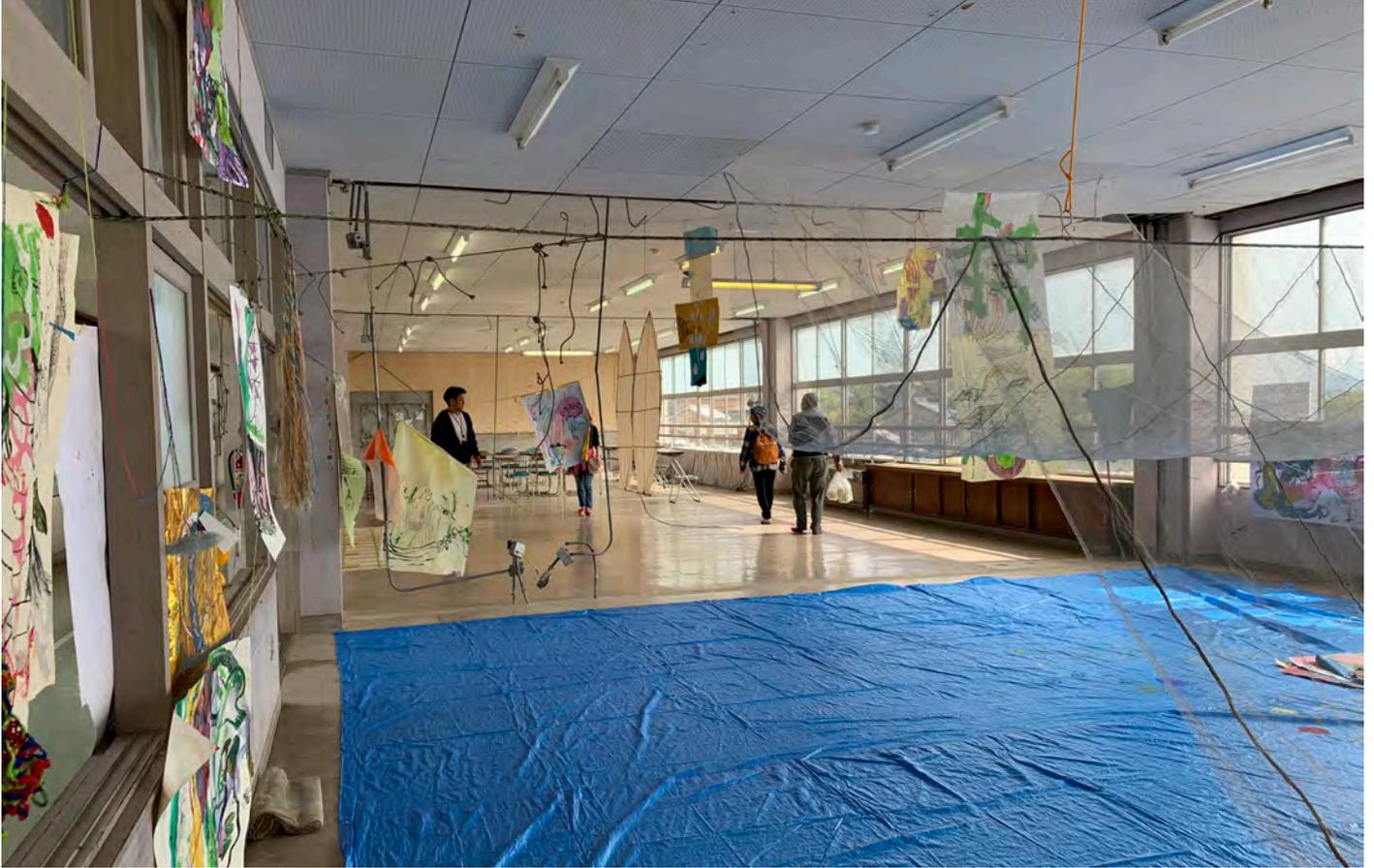


Fig. 35 Artworks installed in disused building of former elementary school on Ibukijima.

Curatorial ethics are a particularly important aspect of the Setouchi Triennial. This is due to the charged nature of certain exhibition components – notably the artists and volunteers’ engagement with at-risk communities – and the long duration of many programmes under its umbrella. Examples of these at-risk communities include the aging islanders, those living with the aftermath of toxic industrial waste dumping, and the residents of the Oshima sanatorium. This durational nature of certain projects have required a deeper engagement from both artists and the local people, allowed for greater impact in the long term.

The Setouchi Triennial is unusual in having the same artistic director, Fram Kitagawa, for all its editions since its inception. Most major large-scale exhibitions and festivals have a one-time guest curator or artist director who works with a team, often a mix of local and international curators. The time frame for major exhibition planning is usually somewhere between one to three years. Kitagawa’s involvement in other socially-engaged curatorial projects elsewhere in Japan have also expanded the time frame and broadened the sociological context by which to evaluate the evolution of a long-term curatorial position and how it is actualized in practice. Besides the Setouchi Triennial, Kitagawa has also helmed the Echigo-Tsumari Triennale since 2000

and the Oku-Noto Triennial since 2017. His curatorial model of sustained community engagement has become very influential on other curators in Japan over the years, especially in tandem with the international art-world trend towards socially-engaged art projects.

The Setouchi Triennale has recently restructured its programming to include a roster of regular activities on the islands in the period between each triennale. Labelled as Art Setouchi, this is a new overarching framework that will encompass future triennials as well as in-between programming. This is an important gesture towards maintaining a continuing relationship between the contemporary art initiatives and the island communities. This symbolic commitment is critical to the long-term sustainability of the triennale, especially given some of the islanders' distrust of external initiatives at the outset.

While Naoshima has the highest media visibility and Teshima is acclaimed by the architectural world, it is the smaller islands like Oshima and Awashima that present some of the biggest challenges to the formation of a stable ethical position in the curatorial approach. This position needs to be consistent in the processes of artist selection, conceptual development of an artwork, and maintaining levels of community engagement. Kitagawa has been especially cautious and careful with the selection of suitable artists to present works on Oshima. Indeed, the Japanese artists who have participated – Seizo Tashima, Fuyuki Yamakawa, Tomoko Konoike and the Yasashii Bijutsu collective – appear to have a sense of special responsibility towards the Oshima residents.



Fig. 36 Shoko Sasakawa, the Koebi-Tai coordinator for Oshima, explaining the curatorial process for the artworks on the island.

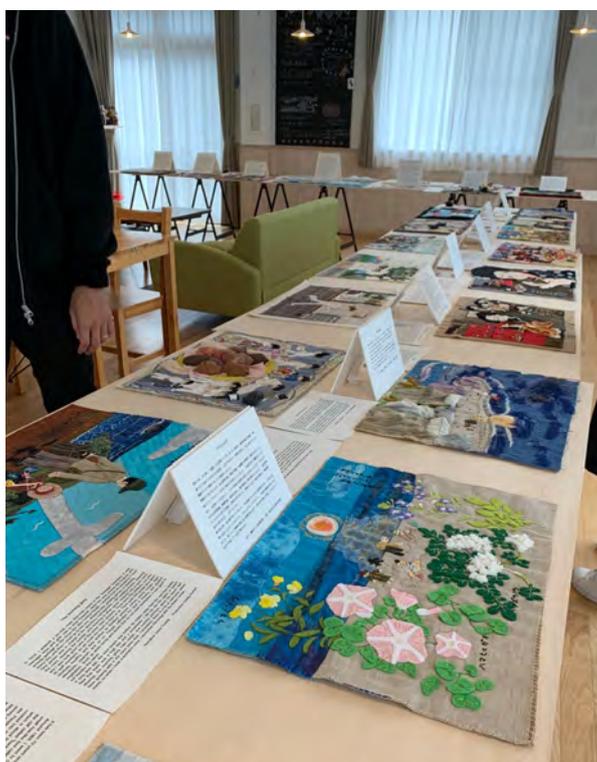


Fig. 37 Tomoko Konoike, *Storytelling Table Runner in National Sanatorium Oshima Seishoen* (2019), site-specific installation, mixed media embroidered table mats and text in the Café SHIYORU, Oshima.

Kitagawa's Art Front Gallery also supports the Oshima artists' continued engagement with a small regular stipend during the non-triennial period. The process of developing suitable artworks for the island has also been different in that the Koebi-Tai volunteer coordinator Shoko Sasakawa has been closely involved throughout. As the person who has had the most and longest contact with the Oshima residents over the past decade – Sasakawa has been with the Koebi-Tai since 2010 – she is an ideal person to mediate between the residents' sensitivities and the artists' ideas. It is her voice that counts most in preparatory discussions as the Oshima residents are reluctant to voice their opinions directly, often demurring by saying that they don't know much about contemporary art.

Balancing between inclusion and depth of engagement is another curatorial challenge when trying to have as many islands involved as possible. Some islands have felt overshadowed by the more "popular" or larger islands. On Awashima, we found that some of the islanders were unhappy that their island seemed to only attract one-time day visitors. Some islanders even spoke about not participating in future editions. However, it is unlikely that the island was curatorially slighted as Dinh Q. Le, one of the most well-known international artists participating in 2019, presented a set of three works on Awashima. Furthermore, visitor numbers were high on the fall opening weekend that I was there, with an estimated 3,000 people per day. Still, such complaints speak to a longing for a different time when the islands had livelier inhabitation.



Fig. 38 Dinh Q. Le, *A Bouquet for the Lady of the House* (2019), site-specific installation, in a vacant house on Awashima.

Ecological Sustainability



Fig. 39 Rice terraces in Teshima. Photo credit: Masami Adachi

Even though the Setouchi Triennale has increased footfall on the Setouchi islands, the problem of ecological sustainability is looming large on the horizon. Choices may have to be made in the near future. There is a dilemma between preservation, the possible regression to earlier ways of living, or progress/change towards an unknown future with no definite promise of a happy ending.

It has been three decades since contemporary art was introduced to the Setouchi islands with the opening of the Benesse House Museum in 1992. While the start of this contemporary art adventure had been motivated by Fukutake's personal desire to share his family art collection with a larger audience and to revitalise the Setouchi region where he had grown up, the success and scale of the Setouchi Triennale today means that its direction can no longer be quickly and easily decided. The curatorial team has also expanded and the website has been updated with a lot more information translated into English. For the 2019 edition, there was even an attempt to introduce an app for visitors. The organizing of the triennale now involves the prefectural government as well as local leaders who have an important role in decision-making when it comes to resource

allocation and permissions. There are now more stake-holders with different agendas and it is clear that a one size fits all approach will not work across all the islands.

The success of cultural tourism in the Setouchi islands itself places new pressures on island resources. The islands themselves have changed over the past decade and the impact of contemporary art's presence includes changes in the physical landscape and the working of the local economies. The composition of the different island communities has also changed over this period, in terms of population size and demographics, leading to new goals and motivations. Since the early 1990s, new generations of islanders have come of age, and the socio-political, even historical contexts have given rise to new needs and wants.

The triennale volunteers and the visitors make up a significant presence during the festival but they are just a transitory population. The seasonality of visitors, even on the main art islands, is a concern for those involved with cultural tourism. A couple of Teshima islanders have noted that the triennale's effect in attracting visitors was more limited now as the main Benesse art islands of Naoshima, Teshima and Inujima do not have many new artworks, if any, for the triennale. The art-sites on these islands were mostly open year-round anyway so art tourists no longer had an urgency to visit during the festival. For the smaller islands, which lack food and accommodation options, it will continue to be difficult to attract visitors beyond the one-off day trips. Sparse transport is another big issue and affects everything from inter-island ferries and boats to intra-transport options such as cars and bicycles for moving around on the islands itself.



Fig. 40 Schoolchildren on the boat to Oshima. Photo credit: Masami Adachi

On the islands of Naoshima, Shodoshima, Ogijima and Inujima, which have had some success in attracting young families with children, education and healthcare needs will be of growing importance in the future. The urban-rural migration that has led more young people, including Koebi-Tai volunteers from other countries, to stay on will mean that more attention has to be given to needs beyond basic food and accommodation issues. It is not clear if these issues will be taken up at the prefectural government level or whether the Fukutake Foundation will review their human resource policies to support employees who decide to settle down on the islands and start families. Notably, the Mitsubishi's industrial activities on Naoshima has been an important factor in sustaining a stable population level that justifies the provision of certain amenities and services on the island.



Fig. 41 A fisherman getting ready to set off for a day's work. Boat docked at Karato Port, Teshima.

There are two critical issues that will impact the ecological sustainability of contemporary art on the Setouchi islands: first, having sufficient human resources to support life and cultural tourism on the islands, as well as the renewal of its natural resources, especially food; and second, the development of an up-to-date cultural tourism infrastructure that is compatible with the accessibility needs of an aging population, whether resident, worker or tourist.

The size of the islands affects their ability to support solutions to these issues. Shodoshima, for example, is much bigger in terms of both size and population. It has more people at the local government level who are involved in island planning and engaged with the local community. Its relatively larger size also means that it can support more diversity in local farming and other industries, such that residents from other islands sometimes shop there instead of the port cities if they need something that's not found on their own island. Inujima, on the other hand, has such a small population that when its thirty-plus residents expressed an interest to see Hiroshi Sambuichi's new town hall in Naoshima, the Benesse organization was able to organize a day trip by chartering a boat that fit all the Inujima residents at the same time.



Fig. 42 Chef Yukio Kawamoto and his family run the farm-to-table restaurant Nonoka on Shodoshima. The restaurant tries to use local and regional organic produce wherever possible and even provided bento sets as part of a triennale art project.

It was also a question whether the contemporary artworks had the ability to constantly attract new visitors given that art tourists were unlikely to make repeated trips to see the same works. In the coming years, the nature and quality of the artworks will become more important as the novelty of first-time visits to the Setouchi islands wear off. Will the museums be able to attract repeat visitors from the rest of Japan or as far as Tokyo and New York? After the extensive amount of resources put into creating the artworks, what happens to them after the festival is over? Are there major artworks of significant art historical or market value that have resulted from the past decade of contemporary art activities? Oshima, with its new history museum, has started to attract organized school groups to the island. There is also a children's camp that takes place once a year, much to the joy of the residents. However, given that the Oshima residents' mean age is in the 80s, what happens to the newly established museum and the contemporary artworks when there is no one left?

All these are questions that remain to be answered when considering the ecological sustainability of contemporary art on the Setouchi islands.



Fig. 43 Artworks installed inside the former maritime academy buildings on Awashima.

Conclusion and Future Directions



Fig. 44 View of Takamatsu port town from boat headed towards the islands. Photo credit: Steve Chen

Although it has only been around three months since I left Japan in January 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the world. I wonder whether I will still recognize the places I visited and the people I met when I return to Japan. Even in the six months I was there, in the run-up to the postponed Tokyo Olympics, the urbanscape was already transforming; smaller art spaces in Tokyo were being pushed out of the city centres and some, like Vacant in Harajuku, closing for good. The Aichi Triennale's censorship controversy had also brought things into sharp relief. From festivals to museums, the growing volume of right-wing political protests encroaching into the contemporary art sphere could no longer be ignored. The virus has also revealed the cracks in social structures, showing how the inequalities or injustices borne by the less fortunate are ultimately everyone's burden to share. In that sense, the research at Setouchi seems more urgent and relevant than ever. While the future remains uncertain, change can also clear the space for better things to come.

An important outcome of the fellowship is that I gained deeper and complex understanding of the contemporary art scene in Japan, particularly in learning about the practices of maturing artists and curators and the local/national contexts they work in. For example, I was able to see Yusuke Asai's huge outdoor mud mural at the Tobiu Art Camp in Shiraoi, a small intimate wall mural at a collector's private space in Onomichi, and his floor murals at various outdoor sites on Inujima.

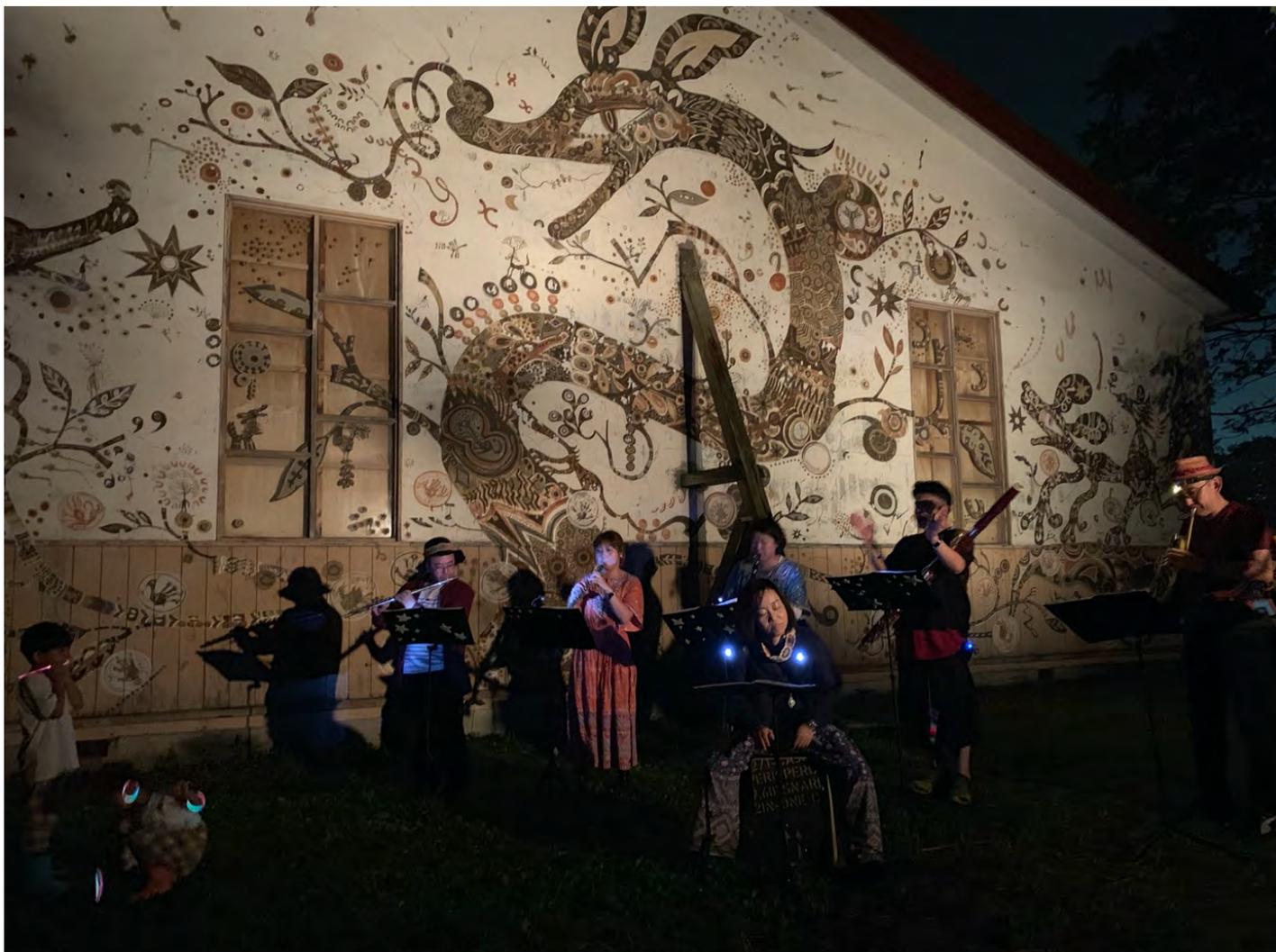


Fig. 45 Live musicians in front of Yusuke Asai's mud mural at the 2019 Tobiu Art Camp in Shiraoi, Hokkaido.

At the Echigo-Tsumari Art Field, I gained a broader understanding of Kitagawa's curatorial approach in a very different environment, working with the Niigata landscape and community. It was especially valuable to see the artworks by architects, especially MAD Architects' restoration of the tunnel in Kiyotsu Gorge.

To gain a fuller understanding of the Setouchi Triennale's socio-economic impact, I believe that more data needs to be collected and analysed by researchers from other fields and disciplines. Economic data might include, for example, estimates on the number of man-hours and amount of financial and physical resources spent on producing, exhibiting and removing the artworks. It would also be useful to know how much wastage there has been, by measuring the amount of trash and non-biodegradable materials that had to be disposed of



Fig. 46 MAD Architects (led by principal Ma Yansong), *Tunnel of Light* (2018), site-specific architectural intervention in the Kiyotsu Gorge, part of the Echigo-Tsumari Art Field in Niigata.

in landfills – that could help in coming up with recycling or upcycling solutions that could mitigate the environmental impact of cultural tourism on the islands. The Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, Japan, published a useful short report in 2014 titled “Case Study – Contemporary Art and Tourism on Setouchi Islands, Japan” (OECD, 2014) that briefly discusses cultural tourism in Setouchi as a success story. An updated cost-benefit study and analysis of the environmental impact could include calculating the carbon footprint from the extensive air and sea travel undertaken not only by visitors but also by artists and volunteers from abroad.

The field research over the past six months has been broader than anticipated, as I learnt about new areas for further study through Japanese artists, curators and academics with local knowledge of the region. In order to manage this ambitious scope of interests, I selected key topics as “access points” for navigating through the research and fieldwork. These topics include population aging, reverse urban-rural migration, farm-to-table food economy, and physical transformations in landscape by way of designed additions to the built environment (architecture and urban planning). By using these nodes to anchor the research framework and the design of suitable methodologies, I aimed to collect clusters of information. The

task now is to distil the key findings that are relevant to understanding the nature and future of contemporary art in this unique region. Hopefully, these insights will not only be interesting to the fields of Japanese art history and contemporary visual culture, but will also aid future cultural research and economic policy making.

In the coming year, I intend to start presenting the research at conferences and to publish papers on selected issues in field-appropriate journals. I plan to return to Japan after the COVID-19 pandemic has subsided to carry out a final round of formal interviews, towards the publication of a book that examines the impact of contemporary art on the Setouchi islands.

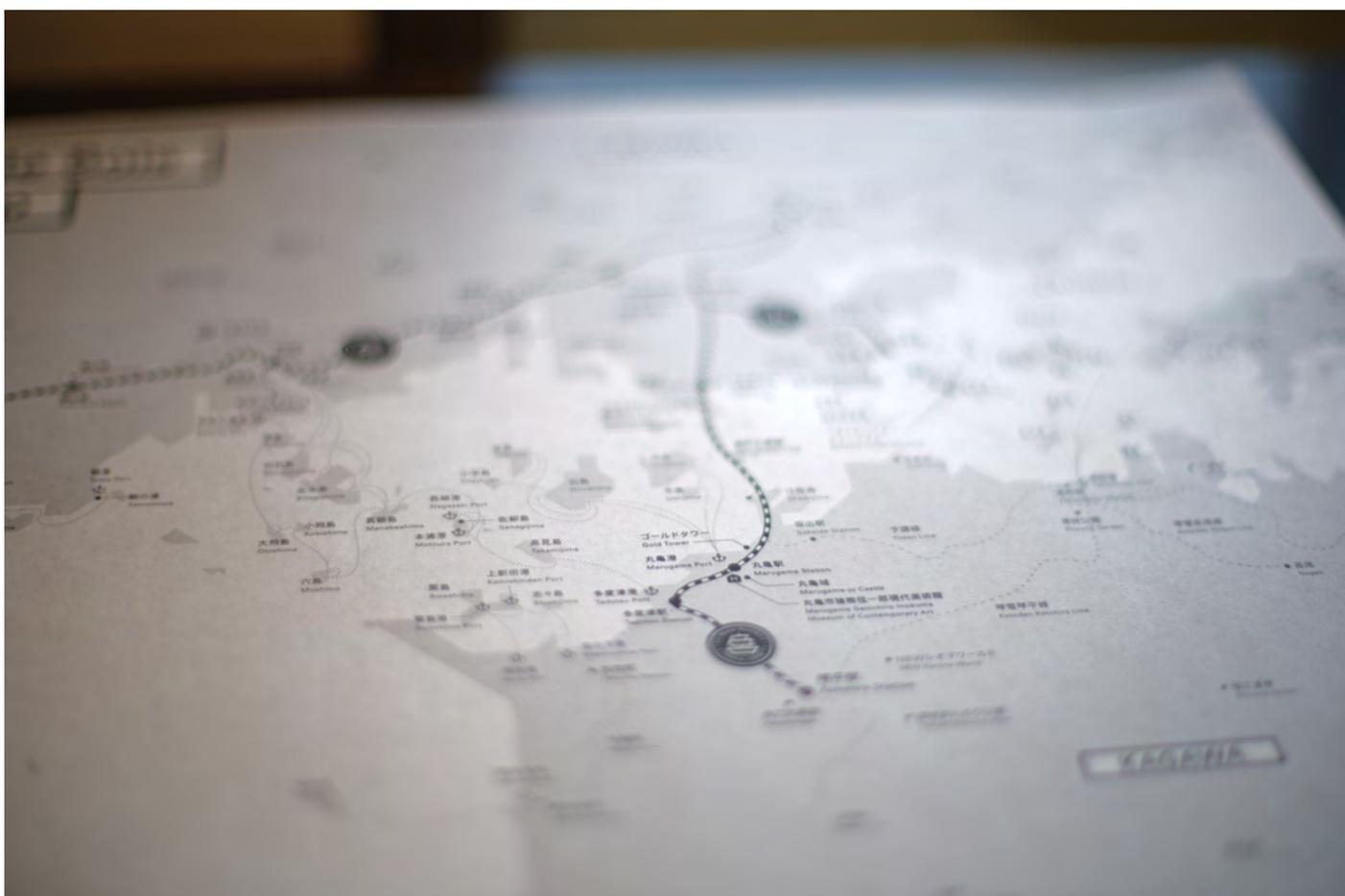


Fig. 47 Map view of the Setouchi region. Photo credit: Steve Chen

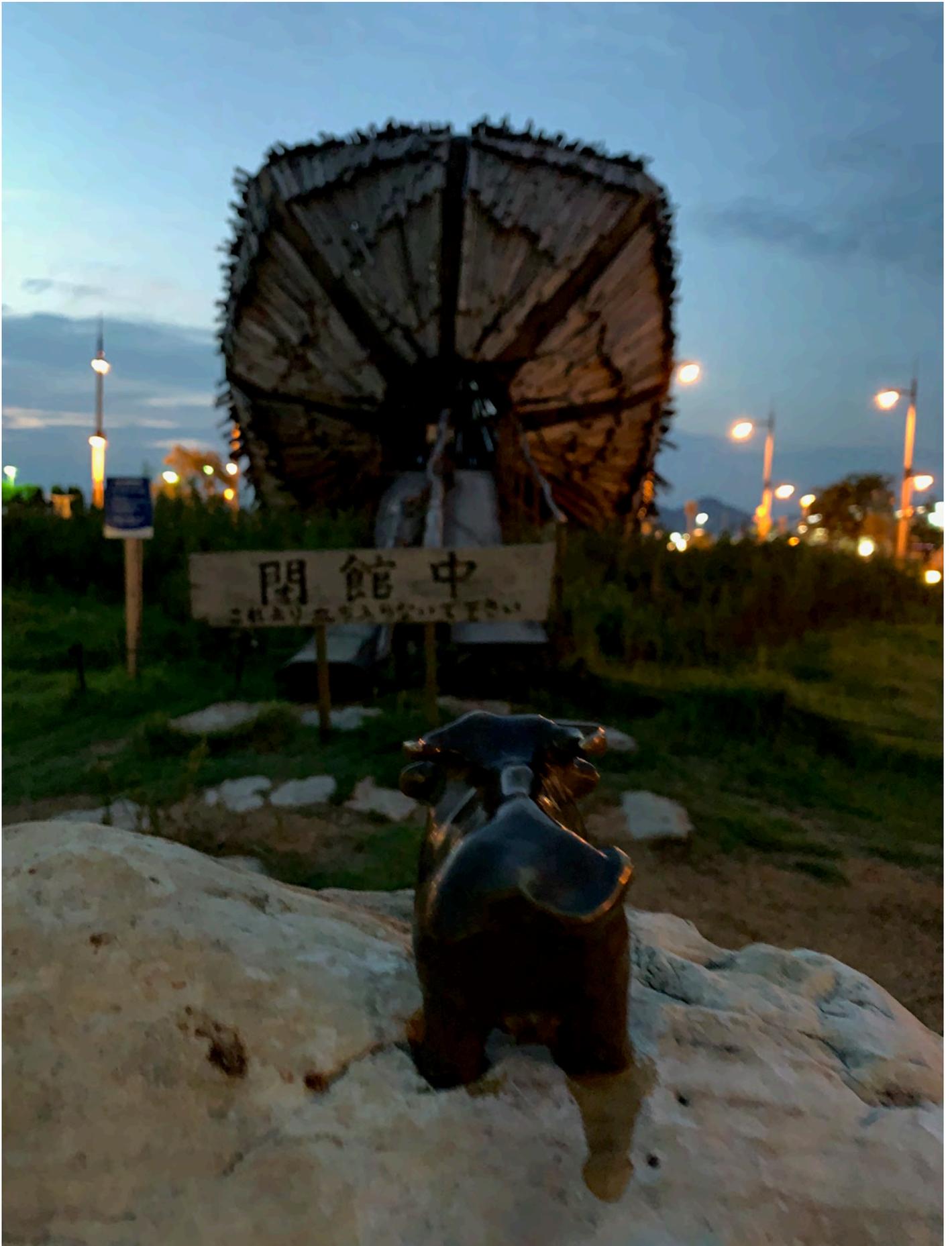


Fig. 48 Lun Shuen Long, *Beyond the Borders – The Ocean* (2019), sculptural installation, natural fiber, variable dimensions, in Takamatsu. Described as a traveling “seed ship”, this artwork was installed on a beach in Teshima for the 2013 triennale and moved to Takamatsu for the 2016 triennale and is now a permanent exhibit in the port town.

Final report prepared by:

Michelle Lim
Assistant Professor (Art History and Contemporary Curating)
Nanyang Technological University

Design and layout:
Andrew Ng

Research assistance:
Goh Wei Hao
Andrew Ng

Photography and video documentation:
Masami Adachi
Steve Chen

Interpretation and translation:
Kajita Taketo
Kelly Lim
Saito Tomoko
Yachita Mio

Special thanks to:

Japan Foundation
Aizawa Kyoko
Shogase Mari

Embassy of Japan in Singapore
Nemoto Saina

Tokyo University of the Arts
Kamakura Sumiko
Mōri Yoshitaka

Fukutake Foundation
Aoki Shingo
Tajima Tomoko

Setouchi Koebi Network
Sasakawa Shoko

Benesse House Naoshima
Seimiya Yuko

James Jack, Yale-NUS College
Oshita Atsushi, Shodoshima town council
Yamakawa Fuyuki, artist